

A REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND ART

# *Horizon*

EDITED BY CYRIL CONNOLLY

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BY PHILIP TOYNBEE

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# COMMENT

WE have now considered two main factors in the condition which we call 'Inflationary Decadence': the economic insecurity of the artist and the ambiguous role of the State. There remains a third: the collapse of criticism. This, of course, is interlocked with the other two, for since his books take a long time to write and seldom command a large sale, a critic will fall back on reviewing. The salient observation which a visitor from Mars would make, if asked to admire our foremost critics, is the extreme brevity which they have adopted. Mr. Desmond MacCarthy is generally considered our best but it must be a long time since he has written (except occasionally on the theatre) an article of more than eight hundred words—the length required by the opulent Sunday newspapers. Critics, in fact, may be divided into the eight-hundred-word Sunday and the sixteen-hundred-word weekly classes. The book-reviewers for daily papers, since they have to review several books at once in their eight hundred words, rarely find space for more than a few general indications.

Now the sixteen-hundred-word critic (V. S. Pritchett and Raymond Mortimer are examples) can give a very good picture of one item. On the weekly level an author is likely to get justice done to him on his last book, however skimmed it will be elsewhere, but he can never obtain it for the bulk of his work. No one has now the space for a Macaulay essay on his whole output, for the criticism which unravels the skein in the carpet, by making clearer the stages in an author's development, helps him to see his way ahead. Here two factors enter in. It is not only difficult to place articles of considerable length on living writers and be paid for them, it is an arduous task to get them written. For, apart from the best critics, often too over-trained as sprinters to enter for these marathons, one encounters a stubborn field of resistance. This is the Envy Belt. The Envy Belt encircles every writer of talent at about the middle distance. Immediately round him are his friends and fellow craftsmen who either like him personally or are sufficiently obsessed with their own task not to experience the green-eyed monster. Below them stretches the Envy Belt, beyond it again a vague Fan Belt that fades out into the wastes of ignorance. It is the aim of the Envy Belt to increase its power by constantly detaching groups

from the zones above and below. When these have been destroyed and there are no more friends, and no more fans either, it sets about devouring someone else. Yet were twenty of our outstanding authors to name the writers and editors from whom they invariably had bad reviews the lists would be surprisingly homogeneous, and these reviewers would also be found not to differ very much from their predecessors, who used to maul the youthful Tennyson and Keats. 'Righteousness is the hall-mark of unconscious guilt,' remarks Dr. Glover profoundly in this issue, and the characteristics of the Envy Belt are usually intense moral indignation (often concentrated on occasional errors in grammar or spelling), a vanity in proportion to their envy (for envy is the price we pay ourselves—and exact from others—for being vain), and a bitter sense of their own frustration. If, in particular, some writer has in youth shown considerable promise, especially promise of a quite outstanding sterility, he will never be forgiven by his ex-colleagues. Flap-eared, sphincter-mouthed pin-heads, donnish journalists or journalist dons, old soaks who have written nothing for twenty years, join the chorus of detraction.

'Out of England have we come  
Great hatred, little room.'

Almost as bad is the tendency among other reviewers to indiscriminate praise which is a kind of guilt-offering made to the writer by those who know they lack both the time and the space to evaluate him properly, and who say a few nice things because such things are generally said and because in our close and convivial society mercy makes so much less trouble than justice.

What can HORIZON do about it? A year ago we announced a series to be called 'The Best and the Worst', in which we hoped to secure long and balanced revaluations of the whole *œuvre* of contemporary writers by critics who were genuinely obsessed with their subject, with an ambivalent feeling of love and hate from which the whole truth might proceed. It has proved very difficult to launch, but at last it is coming into being and we shall welcome further contributions of this nature. In this issue Philip Toynbee examines Virginia Woolf, while the Christmas number will contain an essay by Rose Macaulay on Evelyn Waugh, and we hope that eventually every outstanding Anglo-American will be represented.



EDWARD GLOVER

# RIGHT, LEFT OR CENTRE

## A PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACH TO PARTY POLITICS

BEING by nature timid and, like most other retail dealers, regardless of the susceptibilities of customers, medical psychologists seldom meddle with politics. During professional hours, at any rate, this is as it should be. A patient's politics, like his religion, should not be made the subject of direct analysis, unless it can be convincingly demonstrated that they present pathological features or serve as a screen for disordered emotions. Unfortunately many clinical psychologists take a pride in maintaining their professional airs out of doors. This leads to the absurd situation that except in the polling booth few of them engage in political activity or even express opinions on political issues. Yet if ever there was a subject that called for objective judgement it is surely the part played by political activity in preserving or disturbing man's mental balance. Capable of arousing convictions that are difficult to distinguish from the perfervid beliefs of religious converts and associated at the same time with every variety of hostile expression from plain insult to persecution and civil war, politics provide mankind with an arena in which their ideals can openly jostle with their prejudices, their reformist zeal struggle for place with their need to dominate, and their revolutionary caprices conflict with devotion to rule of thumb. The fact that political parties range themselves in opposing camps and, when not preoccupied with their own virtues, are busy pointing out the wrongheadedness of their opponents, need not conceal from us that, regarded as a political animal, man is constantly at loggerheads with himself. There is in fact no stouter Tory than a revolutionary in power and, in opposition, no greater revolutionary than a die-hard.

It is vain for the psychologist to justify his timidity on the plea that he is 'above' the political hurly-burly. Granted that politics, like war dances, are largely animistic exercises in which objective sociological aims play a subsidiary role, that

mass-movements in politics are little more than the torpid respirations of a gigantic group-animal, nevertheless it must be conceded that they help to shape our social destiny and are therefore the legitimate concern of the psychologist. In any case, no one but the psychologist will believe that his attitude of political detachment is more than a bedside mannerism. The God-complex may die hard but it deceives nobody.

The first and indeed the main service that dynamic psychology can render sociology is to *translate the aims and techniques of politics in terms of their instinctual reference*. However much opposition this may arouse, it is the only method that promises to by-pass emotional prejudice or suspend the issues of right and wrong that so persistently confuse political thinking. Man lives perpetually close to his most primitive instincts, to which his thoughts, feelings and actions are bound apprentice. No political diagnosis can hope to be accurate unless all the instincts involved are traced and identified. The more accurately we can measure the forces that activate politics, the less likely we are to be led astray by perfectionist values. Being a guilty animal, man is lured into politics primarily by his need for peace of mind, and is often blind to the fact that the ultimate test of a political system is its adaptation value—in other words, the degree to which it can bring about a satisfactory balance of his conflicting instincts.

The second step in political analysis turns on the fact that *the structure of society is determined by the distribution of instinct*. Society is an integral part of man's mental apparatus giving expression to some of his most important instinctual needs, and reflecting some of his most important instinctual conflicts. Political differences over the structure of society merely reflect internal conflicts over the distribution of instinct in the individual. Two types of conflict can be isolated: an archaic or infantile type having little reference to the adult needs of society, and a more realistic conflict over ways and means of regulating adult social life. Being for the most part unconscious and at the same time violently emotional, the former take precedence over the more rational conflicts. Political parties derive their emotional strength from the infantile type. Their realistic strength depends on the degree to which they are in touch with the most important modes of adult social adjustment and can promise relief from adult social stress.

When we seek to apply these dynamic and structural principles to the analysis of current political movements, we find that the task has been greatly simplified by the work of the early Communists and, in this country at any rate, by the rise of the Socialist Party to executive power. So long as political conflict was restricted to tussles between 'Conservatives' and 'Liberals' analysis of political programmes in terms of their instinctual reference did not establish any distinct cleavage between them. Both Right and Left Parties spread their interests widely over the social field. They were ready to join battle on such diverse issues as imperialism, Home Rule (for Ireland), religious education, taxation of imports or methods of controlling the consumption of alcohol. By so doing they demonstrated their concern with love of God, love of international prestige and power, love of national independence, self-preservation or aggrandizement and love of sobriety or, contrariwise, love of man's freedom to produce illusion by means of drugs. But no ruling psychological issue was at stake. By advancing an exclusively economic interpretation of history the founders of the Communist Party set a new fashion in politics. *They committed themselves to a simple form of dynamic psychology.* If the proverbial visitor from Mars found only one trace of human existence, and that the Communist Manifesto, he would be entitled to conclude that man was a creature endowed with one instinct only—the instinct of acquisitiveness, that he evolved in the wrong direction because his economic environment was governed by the same instinct but that he would of a surety evolve in the right direction provided these conditions were overcome by force, and provided the force were successfully applied by Communist Leaders. Of man's power of love our visitor would infer little. He would certainly never suspect that man was a reproductive animal whose offspring pass through an unusually prolonged phase of immaturity, that for almost a quarter of their average life-span his children require to be nourished in a secure psychological setting, and that nowadays it takes a further ten years before they in their turn can build a family in which the next generation will be reared.

This forcing of monistic psychological theories into the forefront of politics was carried a stage further by the Socialist Party. It has always been open to the Communist to maintain that the

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dictatorship of the proletariat and the establishment of a central Communistic government controlling production and distribution are merely preliminary stages of social development; that, once production is freed from Capitalist control, the State will, to use Engel's phrase, 'wither away'. The development of State Socialism brought about a further simplification of political psychology. The Socialist Party not only reaffirmed the economic interpretation of history but tied itself irrevocably to the establishment of a centrally directed Socialist State. In other words, it linked its dynamic formulations to a *fixed structural psychology*. Following the recent Socialist victory political controversy in this country has been narrowed down to two issues. One is a problem in dynamic psychology, namely, whether man's instinctual needs are best satisfied by forcible control of his acquisitive instincts. The other is essentially a structural and sociological issue, viz., whether this control should be tripartite, i.e., shared between the individual, spontaneously formed groups and an elected central executive, or whether the State should be the sole controlling power. From the developmental point of view this second issue can be stated in more direct terms: is man's further evolution to be secured by expansion of his individual faculties and controlling mechanisms or by extension of his group institutions. The function of the State has now become a focal issue. Our present political rulers, having apparently decided to continue the experiments in state control initiated by Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany, have, whether they know it or not, embarked on an experiment in mental evolution.

Unfortunately discussion of these crucial issues is hampered by the fact that the force of political conviction is emotional rather than intellectual. As has already been indicated, infantile emotional conflicts unconsciously take precedence over adult political problems. Astute political leaders are well aware of this fact. Realizing that the form of political systems is not determined by the spontaneous development of political thinking amongst the electorate, they seek to gain support for their own ideologies by mobilizing in the masses the simplest of group emotions. It is absurd to suppose that the fading out of the Liberal Party after the First World War represented a conversion of individual voters to the doctrines of Socialism, or that a Conservative majority implies a landslide to the principles of the Primrose

League. *Electoral triumphs depend on the application of hypnotic techniques.* As in the case of individual psychotherapy, these emotional techniques must be applied at the psychological moment. The reigning party must, for example, have been in power long enough to attract to itself an intensity of hatred capable of loosening the unconscious rapport that holds its more fickle supporters in temporary bondage. As we have seen recently, this hatred is all the more effective when the electoral appeal is made at the end of an exhausting war. Some scapegoat must be found to assuage the war-guilt of the masses. The opposition have only to harness this hatred to a pseudo-religious programme, sweeten the political bait with an appeal to self-interest, and, given an efficient advertising department and an avoidance of electoral blunders, the result is a foregone conclusion.

But if political systems are promoted by leader groups and foisted by them on a suggestible electorate, an essential part of political analysis must be the recognition of the emotional forces that animate leaders. Here again the development of Left Wing ideologies has greatly simplified the task of the analyst. By associating their political programmes with the abolition of oppression and abuse, the promotion of the material well-being of the masses and the building of an ideal State, the Left Wing leaders have appealed simultaneously to the self-interest, the sense of justice and the religious aspirations of a majority of the electorate. By the same token they have given expression to a belief in their own righteousness. And since righteousness is the hall-mark of unconscious guilt, we are forced to the conclusion that for leaders as well as for the led, politics provide a fundamentally religious outlet—a pursuit of peace of mind. Opponents of the British Socialist Party, their insight sharpened by electoral defeat, have not been slow to comment on the priggishness of the new Government and on the doctrinaire rigidity displayed by those members of it who spring from the upper and upper-middle classes. But they have not drawn the obvious moral. Clearly the Right has failed to provide a programme that would undercut the self-righteousness and reformist zeal of their opponents and so undermine the unthinking support the latter draw from the electorate. It has opposed self-righteousness with smugness, gambling as always on the ancestor-worship of the

community, a force which is greatly weakened in times of stress.

Space does not permit a detailed examination of the emotional make-up of political leaders. Two useful generalizations can, however, be advanced: first, that the more violent the conflict between political parties, the more the opposing leaders have in common, and second, that political differences in outlook amongst leaders are due to differences in the distribution of their loves and hates. To give a simple instance: a revolutionary party in opposition can count with certainty on the support of those who attempt to solve their adolescent (and earlier) conflicts by attacking established authorities and institutions; a Conservative Party in opposition can count on the pious support of those who attempt to solve their adolescent (and earlier) conflicts by identifying themselves with established authorities, and who, therefore, rally to the support of an overturned hierarchy. The mental energies and emotions are identical: both parties love and hate authority: the difference lies in the distribution of their love and hate, or, more technically expressed, in the objects of their love and hate.

But although it is manifestly absurd that the solution of realistic problems should depend on the result of an emotional tussle between the self-righteous and the smug, it must be recognized that under democratic systems of Government there is no immediate prospect of altering this state of affairs. In theory it might appear that the development of a 'Liberal' Centre party would temper emotional extremism with compromise, but the danger of a Centre party is that instead of being more objective than the Right or Left, it may combine the errors of both. In any case, the pace and scope of political conflicts is set by the extremists. A Centre party cannot operate successfully unless the forces of the Right and Left are equally balanced, and they cannot be equally balanced unless their aims are squarely opposed. Owing to lack of insight on the part of the Right, this vital stage has not yet been reached. *The initiative in amateur political psychology having been seized by the Left, it follows that political progress depends in the first instance on a re-constitution of the political philosophies of the Right.* The Right must produce a creed based on positive creative aims. It is not enough for an opposition to oppose, for the very obvious reason that a negative drive draws its energy



from the aggressive instincts and cannot therefore support a creative (love) aim. The real political strength of the Left does not depend on its emotional appeal to humanitarianism. This is essentially an electoral asset that diminishes from the moment the election is won. The realistic strength of the Left lies in the fact that it has a theory of social development. The Right can oppose the Left effectively only when it produces an equally attractive theory. Only when the extremist parties have staged an opposition of psychological theories corresponding to the divergent tendencies of the mental apparatus is it possible to ascertain whether or not an effective Centre party can be constituted.

\* \* \*

Bearing in mind the main obstacles to realistic political analysis, namely, that politics constitute a spontaneous form of psychotherapy for the emotional conflicts of the community, and that they continue, in modern guise, archaic pre-occupations with the distribution of power in the primitive (totemistic) group, we can proceed to analyse the political psychology of the Left. The objects of this investigation are, in the first place, to determine how far the system takes cognizance of the psychological needs of the community, and, in the second, to indicate the positions that must be taken up by a re-constituted Right in order to secure a healthy equipoise of extremist forces.

\* \* \*

It is scarcely necessary to labour the point that a dynamic social psychology based on a purely economic interpretation of human development and affairs is absurdly inadequate. No doubt in the unpsychological period when it was first propounded it represented a considerable advance in political thinking; but it is now over fifty years out of date. For this reason it is now obscurantist as well as inadequate. Like all other myths, the concept of economic man serves to conceal man's true nature. No amount of pseudo-biological argument can get round the plain facts that the instincts of self-preservation from which the acquisitive impulses are partly derived, are associated with instincts of love and aggression that readily take precedence over egoistic interest; and that the zest and the turmoil of life are derived from a combination of love-impulses with impulses of aggression. The very

stupidity with which man regulates his economic affairs is a convincing proof that purely economic motives play a subsidiary role in his life. If further proof be needed it is to be found in the history of human conflict. When man's mind breaks down, it is practically never because of economic pressure but because of a lack of balance between his loves and his hates. When nations go to war, the motives of national preservation or aggrandizement are only the final rationalizations of conflicts derived from more primitive tensions of love and hate. *In the sense that it obscures a true comprehension of man's nature, the economic interpretation of history can be fairly stigmatized as a reactionary device.* The Left has been able to evade this charge largely because, carried away by a zeal for reform and a conviction of its own righteousness, it has succeeded in persuading itself, and sometimes even its opponents, that only the Right is reactionary. Naturally all political parties are guilty; but it serves no realistic purpose for one party to project this guilt on its opponents. No doubt it is an excellent propagandist device, as witness the often fanatical enthusiasm for ideologies of the Left displayed by intellectuals who have sprung from or are about to graduate to the black coat class. Indeed, there is little hope of solving any economic problem satisfactorily so long as the issue provides a rallying ground for uneconomic emotions.

But although the *dynamic* psychology propounded by the Left is inadequate in the sense that it ignores the obvious nature of man, and reactionary in the sense that it serves to conceal the most compelling sources of his unhappiness, it is not possible to dismiss the *structural* aspects of Leftist psychology with the same ease. Throughout the development of civilized man, two methods have served to control his instincts. One depends on the existence of unconscious mechanisms, the object of which is to reduce mental excitation in the individual to a point at which effective adaptation to environment is possible. The other depends on the development of environmental mechanisms (barriers and counterforces) which reinforce the operation of internal control. Those who regard the first of these methods as the more important belong to the *central* school of psychology: those who favour the second system belong to the *peripheral* school. Naturally these distinctions are not rigid. Individual development is obviously influenced from the earliest stages by social (familial) factors and

social structure is itself a projection of individual forms on to the external world. A good deal of unnecessary confusion has arisen on this point. The real struggle does not lie between man and his environment: it lies between man *plus* society and their common environment. *Society is an externally placed appendage to the individual.* Most sociologists, recognizing the interdependence of individual and social factors, are content to maintain that a realistic development of the human species must involve equal expansion of both influences. One can well imagine the Liberal Sociologist of the future basing his political views on some such 'middle' position. But on closer examination this view is found to beg the whole question of mental *evolution*. It is no doubt true that, as Freud pointed out, the psychology of the primal horde was in the main a group psychology and that with the development and stabilization of the family, the way was open to develop the psychology of the individual. It is also true that subsequently the development of individual psychology moulded all further elaborations of the group. Nevertheless, the fact that, over a long enough period, an alternation can be demonstrated between individual and social influences does not permit the lazy and conflict-saving inference that evolutionary progress calls for an extension in both directions simultaneously.

To this point we shall return; in the meantime we have to note that on this structural issue, the Left has nailed its colours to the mast with large tenpenny nails. Without pausing to examine the nature of instinctual control, it has decided that before individual initiatives are sanctioned, they must subserve the interests of group development; they must be refracted through the group; or at least secure the group imprimatur. *By so doing it has thrown its weight on the side of peripheral psychology.* What the Left does not recognize is that it cannot have it both ways. It has resolved that what I have called the group appendage to man's mind shall develop not merely into a Siamese twin (that would be a 'middle' position), but into a gigantic unit in which existing individuals would function as cellular elements. The Left is, of course, entitled to claim the support of all peripheral psychologists. To that extent its position is not without scientific backing. But the issue is not whether existing group forms can be maintained or improved: it is whether man's *mental evolution* will be best served by making group authority final. Should man exploit

the group or should the group exploit man? The Left, despite its passionate aversion to all except Leftist dictators and exploiters, is in no doubt on the point.

Some glimmering of this fundamental issue has already influenced the political theories of the Right. At the beginning of the century, when, under coroneted patronage, anti-socialist societies took the field, one of their stock arguments was that socialism would destroy 'individualism' and incentive. To this the Left, having scanned the lists of office-bearers, contemptuously retorted that the argument was advanced only in support of capitalist privilege, or at any rate that it was a class argument. And to the extent that the Right received the support of many vested interests, its belief in the virtues of a competitive economic system was certainly suspect. To be sure, the class consciousness of the Left took some of the sting out of its *argumentum ad homines*. Nevertheless, the fact remained that the Right had also dallied with the heresy which the Left magnified to grotesque disproportion, namely, that the main concern of politics is with economic affairs. Had the leaders of the Right been more familiar with the principles of the central school of dynamic psychology, they could have advanced a much less vulnerable case. Briefly, this is as follows: the driving force of all human activity can ultimately be traced to the reservoir of instincts situated in that non-personal part of the unconscious mind which Freud termed the *Id*: the control of these forces is achieved, for the most part unconsciously, in the mind of the individual: the factors promoting development (progression) and malfunction (regression) are in the last resort individual factors; further evolution of the species depends on the amount of release from conflict that can be secured by individual instincts; the group, although teleologically a defensive instrument serving the interests of the species, can outgrow its functions and lead to regression of the individual. In short, *the proliferating margin of psychic development lies in the mind of the individual*; and the rewards and punishments, the incentives and discouragements that stimulate or hamper the activity of this growing edge, are governed by the same pleasure-pain principle that operates in the mind of the suckling.

But it would be a cardinal blunder if the Right were to commit itself unreservedly to maintaining the case of individual as against group development. If human offspring reached effective

maturity within the first five years of life, the case for individualism would be almost fool-proof. The fact is, however, that the proliferating margins of the mind require as much mental protection as the germ plasm requires physical protection; and the tendency of modern civilization has been to establish a 'protectorate' lasting almost a quarter of the average life span. It is possible that this is already an excessive time allowance, although the behaviour of youngish dictators does not encourage us to return to the adolescent standards of past ages. It is true that nowadays we wage bloodier and more bestial wars than our barbaric ancestors, but that is not primarily because we are governed by officials who have reached the male climacteric; it is a consequence of entrusting unlimited power to the mushroom growth we now call the totalitarian state. Anyhow, *we must recognize that under Western Civilization the period from birth to (now) sixteen years of age is a 'close' period during which culture is transmitted from one generation to another.* Admittedly the major part of that culture is handed on during the first five years of life, but between five and sixteen a great number of finishing touches are added before the adolescent experiences his final weaning from the family. The line of argument from now on is obvious. Mental evolution depends on three factors—the inherited psychological constitution transmitted through the unconscious *Id*, the activity of the proliferating margin of mind, and the success of the process of culture transmission. The success of culture transmission depends in turn on two factors—the psychological security and stability of the family and the elimination of such familial and social influences as tend to arrest the free development of the mind, and so to drive it into regressive (archaic or maladapted) activity. Without effective culture transmission there can be no progress in mental evolution. *The first care of the politician should therefore be the protection, improvement and expansion of the MATRIX in which the individual grows to maturity. The first political issue does not lie between the individual and the State, but between the family and the State. To counter the reactionary State policies of the Left, the Right must make the psychological emancipation of the family the main plank of its platform.*

It is only fair to add that in the earlier stages of Socialist controversy, the Right accused the Left of wishing to 'destroy the family'. But this was based at best on a dim intuition of the

psychological issues involved, and at worst on the conviction that the slogan would prove a good Conservative stick with which to beat the Socialist dog. There was apparently no clear realization that that most appealing of all slogans, 'the freedom of the individual', is a psychological and evolutionary ideal, the attainment of which is contingent on maintaining the freedom of the family both from individual hostility and from State compression. Similarly, in its criticism of State control, the Right was content to deal mainly with the economic aspects of this policy, leaving out of account the more important psychological arguments against it. The objection to the principle of State control is not simply that the group may interfere too much with individual incentive, but that, as a guide to and means of expression of the development of the individual, it has little or no competency. As an *instrument* for giving expression to an assented communal drive, it is overwhelmingly powerful, but in the matter of psychological evolution it is hamstrung by its own inadequacies; its function is undeveloped, unorganized, dissociated, subject to emotional disorientation and, except in the case of primitive interests, devoid of psychic continuity. One might as well entrust the nursing of a child to a chimpanzee as leave the development of the individual to the mercies of the State. The group is archaic and still swings uncertainly between the mental organization of the higher apes and that of primitive man.

We must face the fact, however, that the Right has no special lien on sociological understanding. It has dallied too long with the heresy of economic man and is likely to restrict its defence of the liberties of the subject mainly to the material aspects of his life. Its support of the institution of the family is likely, therefore, to be based on a similar misapprehension. Economic security is only one of the steps on the long and painful road towards psychological security. The very bitterness of the controversy over private as opposed to State capitalism is due to a misunderstanding and mishandling of the psychological issues involved. It is not hard to surmise that exaggerated and compulsive forms of profit-seeking, whether practised by the individual, by private corporations or by the State are, like other forms of greed, a sign of psychological disorder; but it is vain to hope that this disorder can be cured either by maintaining an arbitrary and faulty antithesis between the instincts of the



individual and those of the group, or by shifting the point of acquisition from one focus to another. The first step towards effective and lasting economic reform is to establish the relation of economic activities to other forms of instinctual expression; and the second to uncover those emotional beliefs which, masquerading as economic arguments, prevent a reasonable solution of economic problems. If the emotional insecurities that give rise to greed, envy, suspicion and malice in children are responsible for pathological lying, stealing, and grotesque forms of accumulation in childhood, there is good reason to suppose that similar insecurities affect the rational conduct of adults, and that man's patent incapacity to organize his economic affairs on reasonable lines is a symptom of group disorder. Our present attempt to settle the issue by opposing one doctrinaire system with another can do little more than prolong the period of pathological reaction. In any case the fact that the aims and ideals of family organization have been crushed between the upper millstone of group expansion and the nether millstone of individual aggrandizement has gone far to poison the whole atmosphere in which economic problems are handled by politicians. The ethical advancement of both the individual and the State depends on the psychological health of the family. Our economic stupidity is a result of the conflicting egoisms of the individual and of the group; it is by the same token a measure of the extent to which the sources of altruism have been starved and crippled. *Sane economics predicate a sane altruism, and a sane altruism is essentially a by-product of family life.*

It is a habit of the more bankrupt among politicians to preen themselves on their knowledge of affairs and to look down their vulpine noses at the impracticality of armchair psychologists. Yet the operation of the simplest by-law enforced by our hardest-headed town or rural district councils depends on mental forces and mechanisms that can be identified only after careful research into individual and group psychology. The fact that public-houses on one side of Oxford Street are open till 10.30 p.m. and public-houses on the other side till 11 o'clock is not just a monument to the fatuity of licensing justices and municipal councils: it is an indication that two of the root-problems of human conflict have not yet been accurately measured, much less solved. On the one hand the function of illusion formation and of mental anaesthesia

in social life has never been adequately examined: and on the other the relation of both unconscious and sublimated homosexuality to individual and family life has been wilfully neglected. The consumption of alcohol is one of the indices of emotional conflict in the individual and at the same time provides an outlet for these deeper bisexual longings that cannot be satisfied in family life. To be sure, the empirical '11 o'clock' school take a more tolerant view of alcohol-therapy than the advocates of the '10.30' system. But this is not good enough. It is quite absurd that issues of this kind should be settled by a clash of emotional prejudices; that the harsh and un-understanding moralities of 'temperance' societies should compete with the egoistic interests of distillers to solve a problem that concerns the life and soul of the individual and thereby of the community. Similarly with the most mundane of social regulations. The disposal of dust-bins, the cellophane covering of bread or meat exposed for sale, the scattering of picnic litter at beauty spots, the lighting of streets, the size of towns are all 'practical' problems that, examined carefully enough, are seen to arise from the distribution of primitive and mostly unconscious impulses in the individual and later in the group. Up to the present, these problems have been tackled by rule-of-thumb methods backed by rule-of-thumb emotions, and there is little chance that this procedure will be altered until it is more generally recognized that permanent change in human habit depends on developmental factors which can operate effectively only when the developmental *nidus* is in a healthy condition.

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Having indicated, all too briefly, the dynamic and structural factors that govern political conflict, we can now consider ways and means of manipulating political forces. The present approach is based on two premises: first, that, however much the aims of political warfare may change, its technique and emotional strategy is unlikely to alter, and secondly, that since the Left has thrown all its weight on the side of a fixed dynamic and structural psychology of a 'peripheral' type, effective opposition must come from the Right. But first of all the Right must put its own house in order. At present the Conservative Party is busy shaking down with those Whigs and Radicals who find themselves bereft of party authority but unable to stomach conversion to State

Socialism. The sooner these internal differences are composed the better, since effective opposition to group aggrandizement depends on a powerful thrust in favour of family development and of the liberty of the subject. But the Right must also purge itself of its more materialistic aims and traditions. This would be not only good psychology but good political strategy. The Left, having committed itself to group development and having sold itself to the materialistic interpretation of history, is compelled to make a virtue of materialistic class-interests. The situation is an intriguing one. The reproach of 'reaction' once cast at the Right with such zest is about to boomerang. The lien on political virtue claimed by the Left during its nonage is now open to the most realistic bidder. And the Right would be well advised to demolish the myth, sedulously and vociferously cultivated by the Left, that good intentions and a vague humanitarianism justify any sort of doctrinaire system. It will be able to do so with a clearer conscience if it pledges itself to a social psychology that will advance the mental development of individual man. If it achieved nothing else, debunking the self-righteousness of politicians would make the study of politics more supportable.

Assuming that some such re-orientation of the Right can be achieved, it remains to consider whether any effective part can be played by a new Centre Party. No doubt those who are wearied of the importunacies of wing politics sigh for a new Centre or, in the literal sense of the term, Liberal Party. But even if a Centre Party could divest itself of its opportunist and at the same time puritanical traditions, it is open to question whether it could play a decisive part in the present struggle over the form and direction of mental evolution. Compromise on issues of principle is rarely a harbinger of progress. And even the soundest compromise appeals more to reason and tolerance than to emotional conviction: it seldom acquires the driving force that gives extremist policies effective momentum. Added to which, the true moderate, of his very nature, inclines to be inarticulate: at best he makes an indifferent demagogue. No doubt there is a place for a Culture Transmission Party unhampered by extremist convictions. And it might be worth while considering whether the Right should not be fattened up politically in order to take the full thrust of the Left and so leave the way open for the birth of a psychologically-minded Centre Party. A political system in

which the Right and Left had no decisive authority but could act as goads to the tender flanks of the Centre would at all events be an improvement on our present system. Unfortunately there is little hope of arriving at this desirable state of affairs, so long as political movements are determined by conflict—that is to say by an opposition of extreme elements.

In any case, the existence of a Culture Transmission Party would not solve the problem of cultural development. It would make cultural development more elastic, but in the last resort it could not *direct* its progress. We must be clear about this difficulty. The main stumbling block to human development is that, during the early phases of racial history, the mental mechanisms responsible for what we call civilization became completely inaccessible to consciousness. They are and tend to remain unconscious. Hence they continue to function with arbitrary force even when the conditions that called them into existence no longer press for urgent adaptations. We are, for example, still governed by sexual and social conventions that were appropriate when primitive man first established the incest taboo and the laws of exogamy. *Direction of evolution cannot be influenced satisfactorily until we can eliminate the more anachronistic elements of unconscious function.* But as we owe our existence to unconscious regulation of instinct, this is easier said than done. Even in conscious levels it is easier to indicate what we should avoid doing than what we should do. This has been proved up to the hilt by experience of psychotherapeutic treatment. It is even more true of that form of social psychotherapy we call politics.

PHILIP TOYNBEE  
VIRGINIA WOOLF:  
A STUDY OF  
THREE EXPERIMENTAL NOVELS

(1)

‘ONE wanted fifty pairs of eyes to see with, she reflected. Fifty pairs of eyes were not enough to get round that one woman.’

“Like” and “like” and “like”—but what is the thing that lies beneath the semblance of the thing?’

‘Who knows what we are, what we feel? Who knows even at the moment of intimacy. This is knowledge?’

( II )

‘... the words became symbols, wrote themselves all over the grey-green walls. If only she could put them together, she felt, write them out in some sentence, then she would have got at the truth of things.’

“‘Now let me try,” said Louis, “before we rise, before we go to tea, to fix the moment in an effort of supreme endeavour. This shall endure.””

‘Like quicksilver sliding, filings magnetized, the distracted united. The tune began; the first note meant a second; the second a third. Then down beneath a fourth was born in opposition; then another.’

There has never been a novelist with a clearer, a less faltering vision of the novelist’s function and obligations. These two groups of quotations—and to each another hundred could be added—are enough to show that Virginia Woolf’s intentions were exemplary. In common with other artists, the novelist has a two-fold duty—to perceive and to perceive order. The first enemy is the immediate ‘semblance of things’, the ‘semi-transparent envelope’, the sign language of mere appearance which the artist must, now laboriously, now by sudden moments of insight, attempt to decipher. The second enemy is the Janus-headed monster which has Time on one face and Confusion on the other. It is not enough to perceive if the perception be only of further confusion, of Time triumphing. It is not enough to order or arrange, if the ordered counters are worn, familiar and opaque. The first leads to the empurpled riot of that great anti-artist Henry Miller. The second leads to the neat and worthless anecdotes of O. Henry. It is a deep, though usually an unconscious, axiom of the human race that there is order beyond confusion and eternity beyond time. In the artist that faith becomes conscious, passionate and active.

In few artists has this consciousness been keener or more tormenting than in Virginia Woolf. Indeed, on that scale of art which runs from the naïve vision of Bunyan to the overweighted and stultifying self-consciousness of Coleridge, she is close to Coleridge’s monumental limit. In the company of Flaubert, Henry James and Gide, she is among the most reflective and

self-conscious novelists who have ever lived. Whatever may be her failures of execution, there was never a failure of aim. And this clarity of aim makes her a perpetual temptation to the critic, since, unlike more instinctive or confused writers, she promises accessibility. It is not difficult to declare her intentions, for she herself declared them, not only in her criticism but constantly throughout the novels. It is not difficult to cite passages illustrative of these intentions, for every passage was meant to be such an illustration. Indeed, by now the general artistic creed of Virginia Woolf, and her particular interpretations of it, have been made very clear to all her admirers. I believe myself that they deserve all the devout admiration which has been paid to them. Disagreement with the general creed must, I think, imply a fundamental hostility to art. Disagreement with her own attempts to apply the creed shows a failure to understand the state and the needs of the novel during her creative period.

On the other hand, the acclamation of Virginia Woolf's intentions has drowned nearly all critical murmurs against her execution. So often and so well did she proclaim what she wished to do, that few readers resist the assumption that she did it. Yet this constant reiteration of aim should in itself be a ground for hesitation, even for suspicion. Such an excess of protestation rings surely like so many cries of despair, disguised as gallant resolutions to renewed endeavour. In a sense all the novels of Virginia Woolf are the lamentations of the artist herself, all the problems which confront her characters are the immediate artistic problems of their creator. And while it may be true to say that the problem of artistic creation is the essence of all human problems, it should not be forgotten that the essence differs greatly from its infinitely various manifestations. Madame Bovary's predicament is very different from Flaubert's, in spite of his paradoxical self-association with his creature. Nor does it seem that the essence can be directly seized, as Virginia Woolf tries so boldly to seize it. Why else is it that writers' presentation of writers, even of actors and painters, is nearly always a failure? Flaubert disguised himself as Mme. Bovary, and the disguise was not only necessary, but a real enrichment. For the result of it is that Mme. Bovary's predicament is real on two distinct levels: the level of the creature and the level of the creator. But Bernard, Lilly Briscoe and Miss La Trobe are faced with the artistic problem itself, too-easy symbols, one



feels, of the universal problem, too facile a vehicle on which the creator may ride among her creatures. And even the many characters who are not themselves artists do, in their own problems, accept the artist's simplification, perceive too clearly the essence behind the particular manifestation. This too general perception is strangely an impoverishment, for Louis, by his artist's cry (though he is no artist) to 'fix the moment', merely loses something of his identity and therefore something of the reality of his vision.

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Virginia Woolf was an ambitious novelist. Mr. Lionel Trilling has written, with a certain regretful disapproval, of E. M. Forster's 'refusal to be great'. This could never be said of Virginia Woolf, whose ambition it was to alter the whole current trend of the novel, and to present a new vision of reality. Her legitimate claim, therefore, is to be judged by the highest standards. We should not be content to say that she was one of the three or four best English novelists of the century. It is not as the superior of Huxley or Isherwood that she should be seen, but as the claimant to be judged by the standards which we use for Flaubert, for Dostoyevsky or for Joyce. In a short article which attempts a revaluation of this admirable and precious contemporary, it is well to make the standard of judgement clear, for then we can dispense with the tiresome qualification. Discussing weaknesses or failures, we shall not need to add, 'nevertheless how very good she is'. Here that will never be doubted.

All the experimental novelists of this century—and the most notable are Proust, Gide, Kafka, Joyce and Virginia Woolf—were confronting the same technical problem. Their expressions for it differed, and their attempts to solve it differed still more widely; yet the problem was the same. 'Life escapes,' Virginia Woolf complained in her critical assault on Wells and Bennett. Life escaped because these novelists were content to manipulate old counters, merely to rearrange accepted but exhausted symbols of reality. It was not the desire for technical virtuosity which led Henry James, and the experimental novelists who followed him, to break up the old narrative form of the novel. It was the new complexity of vision which demanded a new form of expression. To Virginia Woolf, Bennett's treatment of human beings appeared almost insultingly inadequate. 'She would not say of anyone in

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the world now that they were this or that,' says the novelist through the lips of her creature, Clarissa Dalloway. Yet this is precisely what the traditional novelists, even the greatest of them, had said so boldly. Even Tolstoy, though he seldom made a direct statement to his readers about the character of a protagonist, yet achieved by his omniscient narrative of thought and behaviour a complex but a dogmatic summing-up. Prince Andrew, for example, has a subtle and difficult nature, but the nature is *there*; it can be grasped, it can, by the exercise of genius, be exhibited. Our epoch has conceived differently of Man. Whatever we may think of Freud's attempt to chart the unconscious mind, at least we know that it exists. This new knowledge, combined with the shocking psychological revelations of war and political brutality, has made us far more modest in our formulation of individuals. Just as the nineteenth-century scientist believed that there was a simple unitary scale of time and space, so the nineteenth-century novelist believed that Man himself could be measured, formulated. But to us Man is not only more mysterious than our grandfathers believed: he is also, perhaps, quite literally unknowable. The odd effect of recent discoveries in psychology and anthropology is to weaken confidence, not to fortify it. More appears to have been disproved than proved, so that the image of man has receded into mist. It may well be that this is only a transitional attitude, and that further discoveries will breed simpler and more confident assertions by the novelist. It may be that Tolstoy came closer to the reality of Man than we can do. But the sensitive and thoughtful modern novelist cannot either share the old pretensions to omniscience or make new pretensions. It will not do to introduce a character by writing: 'X was a selfish man whose selfishness made a solitary exception of his mother'. Life escapes, since we cannot (for the time being) say that anybody is this or that.

The reaction of novelists to this new recession of Man has been very varied. Proust believed that it was possible at least to know himself, and to give artistic reality to others by the sheer insistence of his regard. We may think that he came closer to self-knowledge than anyone had done before, but the very fact that we read, and with such avidity, all that the remotest of acquaintances has chosen to write about him shows that we are not satisfied with his own self-analysis. Joyce believed that a realistic minute-to-minute account of an individual's conscious (in *Ulysses*) or unconscious

(in *Finnegans Wake*) thoughts could be combined with certain atavistic patterns of human behaviour to disclose the total nature of Man. Yet, for all their exhaustive presentation, even Stephen and Bloom remain shadowy and intangible figures compared with Nicholas Rostov or Stepan Arkadyevitch. Kafka made marvellous allegories of the unconscious, accepting and making a virtue of man as a receding shadow; while Gide has been content to explore certain curious by-paths of human nature, without attempting a complete or even a coherent picture. It may be that none of these novelists saw the problem so whole and so steadily as Virginia Woolf. That she remains a lesser novelist than her four great contemporaries is due, as I have suggested, not to any false pre-conception, but to the inadequacy of her instruments.

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‘Since he (the novelist) is a single person with one sensibility, the aspects of life in which he can believe with conviction are strictly limited.’ (*Common Reader*, First Series.)

That they are limited is clear, but there are wide degrees of stricture to their limitation. Tolstoy could describe minutely, and it seems correctly, the sensations of a woman throughout the whole process of childbirth. Joyce could confidently enter and inhabit the minds of at least three utterly distinct and dissimilar persons. Indeed, of all artists the novelist should be, not indeed the most impersonal, as Flaubert claimed, but the most richly and generously personal. In ordinary life it is recognized that individuals differ widely in their capacity to enter the minds of others. One attribute of the great novelist is to be able to do this superlatively well. And this is not so much because the novelist’s function is to portray ‘character’, to reveal ‘human nature’, as because he needs ‘fifty pairs of eyes’. Like the sculptor, he must be a *stereoscopic* artist: indeed, that is the only excuse for his continued existence. Appearance, as the Impressionists knew, changes from minute to minute, even within the same vision. It changes from inch to inch as the eyes circumscribe a matchbox. But when the *point de mire* is a human being, itself provided with eyes turned both inward and outward, the stereoscopic possibilities become intoxicating and unruly. Here was the great challenge to the novelist of our time. Man had become intangible, but could he not have his dimensions restored to him by the use of multiple vision? He had become shadowy, but could not the very shade

itself be strangely and beautifully illuminated by the iridescent cloud of witness? Reality is unattainable, but this method surely offered the nearest approach to it.

Knowing all this (and what is it but a slight extension of Henry James' determination to be rid of the narrator?), Virginia Woolf resolved to inhabit the minds and see only through the eyes of her characters. Her tragedy as an artist was that she could not do it.

Of the four novels which are generally recognized as her best—*Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, *The Waves* and *Between the Acts*—the initial experiment was made in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Earlier she had groped towards the intransigence of the later position, and in her last book she was partially to abandon it.<sup>1</sup> The core of her experimental work is to be found in the first three of the novels mentioned above. In her other books she is a fine and unusual writer, but one must feel that she is making a lesser claim. Long before her eponymous novel had been written, Clarissa Dalloway had made a slight and unsympathetic appearance in *The Voyage Out*. It is significant that, while retaining the qualities of worldly frivolity which had been accorded her in the earlier book, the Clarissa of *Mrs. Dalloway* has been toned down almost out of recognition. Virginia Woolf has entered into her and half-transformed her into Virginia Woolf. It is not so much an unobtrusive habitation as a military occupation. The vision of Clarissa has become Whistlerian, full of odd and remote and exquisite associations, delicate, misty and unprecise. It is true that she is consistent in her social delights and in her anxious hospitality. But the language, the atmosphere, are remote from the hostesses we know. 'Clarissa guessed; Clarissa knew, of course; she had seen something white, magical, circular, in the footman's hand, a disk inscribed with a name—the Queen's, the Prince of Wales's, the Prime Minister's?—which, by force of its own lustre, burst its way through (Clarissa saw the car diminishing, disappearing) to blaze among candelabras, glittering stars, breasts stiff with oak-leaves. . . .' This, but for the tiresome and idiosyncratic parenthesis, is very beautifully described. Is it, then, merely the

<sup>1</sup>*Between the Acts* has a freshness and a mastery which strongly suggest that it was not a culmination, but a new beginning. It does not form a natural part of the present subject, any more than does *The Years*, that unfortunate but deliberate regression from the particular experiment considered here.

legitimate artistic transmutation of a sense of glamour accurately observed? Taken alone it might be so, but when we find that this same atmosphere and language enclose nearly all the people in this book, then it must seem that there has been a failure of differentiation. Again, I would insist that one does not require the vision of a social butterfly to be 'realistic', but one does require it to be different from the vision of her very different daughter. 'For although the clouds were of mountainous white so that one could fancy hacking hard chips off with a hatchet, with broad golden slopes, lawns of celestial pleasure gardens, on their flanks, and had all the appearance of settled habitations assembled for the conference of gods above the world, there was a perpetual movement among them.' This is the vision of Elizabeth Dalloway, the shy, the serious, the unsocial. Yet it would be impossible to say with any certainty that it was hers rather than her mother's. Of course, the *characters* are explicitly distinguished, as in any traditional novel, but the vision is similar.

And when, in this book, Virginia Woolf flits for a moment into the mind, behind the eyes, of someone utterly alien and remote, a London flower woman, the result is flat and banal in the extreme: 'Roses, she thought sardonically. All trash, m'dear. For really, what with eating and drinking and mating, the bad days and good, life had been no matter of roses, and what was more, let me tell you, Carrie Dempster had no wish to change her lot with any woman's in Kentish Town.' One has only to imagine the gusto with which Joyce would have embarked on this transition to see how utterly the passage fails.

*To the Lighthouse* is a very much better book than *Mrs. Dalloway*, partly, at least, because Virginia Woolf has set herself an easier problem. The principal characters are almost within her range, and the book is beautifully held together by the dominant role of Mrs. Ramsay. Although she is seen and heard from the inside during the first half of the book, her real role is to be a symbol of wisdom, maternity and timelessness. Technically, perhaps, it would have been more satisfactory if Mrs. Ramsay had been wholly symbolic, for there is a certain discrepancy between her earlier role as a habitable mind and her later role as a symbol in the minds of others. But it was consistent with Virginia Woolf's theory that the approach to reality must be made by both methods, by a character's attitude to himself and to others, and by the

attitude of others to himself. In this book, as has been often pointed out, the narrator has been relegated to such purely explanatory interpolations as 'To her son these words conveyed . . .' How much has been gained by this experimental form?

The experiment is successful in that it works. The mechanism is as smooth as in any traditional novel. The experiment is successful in that we do feel that we have genuinely inhabited minds as different as Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay's, Lilly Briscoe's and Charles Tansley's. That is to say that their thoughts and feelings are differentiated, and that we believe in what they think and feel. But the old mechanism was quite capable of doing this. We know Pierre, André, Natasha and Nicolas from the inside as well as from the outside. If the intention of the new form had been only this then, however agreeable, it was unnecessary. But the intention, as I have tried to show, was much more ambitious than this. It was to present different visions—not, of course, visual alone, but different apprehensions of external reality. But once again I believe that genuine multiplicity of vision has been missed.

After reading the book, we keep an impression of *simple coherence* which genuine multiplicity of vision could not give—which should be given only by such simple poetic forms as lyric, elegy or pastoral. The house, the garden, the sea, Mrs. Ramsay, Mr. Ramsay and the others—the impression we retain of them is *one*. It is true that Mr. Ramsay sees his wife as a wife, and that Charles Tansley sees her as a beautiful maternal protector, but below this superficial level their vision of her is identical. Similarly the descriptions of house, seascape and garden are apportioned among the different characters, but without any perceptible logic. Virginia Woolf has chosen this method rather than the old-fashioned one of giving a direct description herself, but since we see always the *same* sea, the *same* Mrs. Ramsay, it seems that she has failed in her search for variety of vision. Now a novel with a genuine variety of vision, like *Ulysses*, has indeed coherence, or it would not be a work of art. But the coherence is constructed out of an explicit confusion; the unity out of an explicit diversity. Molly Bloom emerges stereoscopically through the eyes of Bloom and Stephen, and finally through her own. She could not have been created in any other way. Mrs. Ramsay, on the other hand, could have been quite as fully, quite as delicately portrayed by the writer's direct description.

But it is *The Waves* which is usually hailed as the conclusive proof of Virginia Woolf's ability to fulfil her intentions. The method adopted in this novel is certainly the logical and austere conclusion of her theory. She has chosen six sharply defined characters, and the 'plot' is simply the vision of each character developing from childhood to late middle age. The opening of the book<sup>1</sup> is a bold manifesto:

"I see a ring," said Bernard, "hanging above me. It quivers and hangs in a loop of light."

"I see a slab of pale yellow," said Susan, "spreading away until it meets a purple stripe."

"I hear a sound," said Rhoda, "cheep, chirp; cheep, chirp, going up and down."

"I see a globe," said Neville, "hanging down in a drop against the enormous flanks of some hill."

"I see a crimson tassel," said Jinny, "twisted with gold threads."

"I hear something stamping," said Louis. "A great beast's foot is chained. It stamps and stamps and stamps."

Thus we are promised, if not fifty, at least six pairs of eyes, and, indeed, the whole book is confined to the minds and senses of these six characters. It is natural to seek for clues in this rather provocative opening, yet it is only in Louis's great beast (so often to recur) that we shall find one. The first five of these introductory observations seem to me to be perfectly interchangeable. There is no difference of language, nor can I find any clear symbolic differentiation.

Soon, indeed, the six protagonists engage in a sequence of soliloquies in which they declare their characters; and these declarations of character continue throughout the book. Not that there is nothing else in the book, but the repetition is evidently deliberate; it is certainly obtrusive. We begin to feel that this subtle and sophisticated writer has turned a full circle and rejoined the old naïve tradition of the mummers: 'Here come I, old Beelzebub!' 'I do not dream,' says Jinny. 'The fact is I have little aptitude for reflection,' says Bernard. 'I have no power of ingratiating myself,' says Neville. Is there, in these rather clumsy self-revelations, any clear advantage over the simple omniscient

<sup>1</sup> I have said nothing of the intermediary passages of prose-poetry. They are clearly decoration, and irrelevant to this discussion.



statements of the old-fashioned novelist: 'Jinny did not dream', 'The fact was that Bernard had little aptitude for reflection'? Of course, it was not Virginia Woolf's intention to make a photographic representation of her characters' thoughts and emotions. The method and the language are stylized, as they should be. But for the exploration of human nature, I cannot see that the device of using alternate first persons shows any advantage over the traditional method. One sees that indeed it *might* have had, but the practice fails to do justice to the theory.

Again the characters' apprehension of each other is exceedingly perfunctory, and adds little to the declaration which each makes about himself. With rare exceptions they use each other only as yardsticks for measuring themselves. Jinny, for example, before her flat statement that she does not dream, had reflected: 'I do not stand lost like Susan . . . or lie, like Rhoda, crumpled among the ferns. . . .' What does not emerge is the six visions of the same person which this method seeks to provide, and might have provided. We do not see Bernard in the eye of Neville, Bernard in the eye of Susan, Bernard in his own eye, and so on, as distinct apprehensions of the same entity. We have Bernard's statement about himself, and we have occasional confirmations of it from the others. The stereoscopic possibilities have again been missed.

One sees the contrast at the single, triumphantly successful passage. In the death of Percival, which is the only definite and embracing episode of the book, Virginia Woolf has magnificently shown the full possibilities of her method. The reactions to the news are beautifully and skilfully differentiated, so that we feel for the first time that the characters have swallowed their labels and digested them. Instead of making declarations about themselves, whether direct or oblique, they *are* themselves; they apprehend not merely in accordance with their allotted characters, but in such a way as to make a coherent but multiple statement about death. And to make a statement of this kind is the proper function of the novelist.

But there are other technical difficulties which have not been overcome. Even in this least episodic of books, it was necessary to pin each character to some context or other, to give some information about what has happened. But when Louis declares to us, 'I was sent to school; I was sent to Switzerland to finish my education,' or Bernard inserts his informatory parenthesis,

'I feel . . . that because of my great happiness (being engaged to be married) . . . ' we are abruptly, even violently held up. The fault may be in us, but the illusion is broken, disbelief is no longer suspended. It is not that we felt or were meant to feel that these interior monologues were realistic streams of consciousness. Gladly we accepted Virginia Woolf's contempt for such a pedestrian ambition. But the necessary illusion was there—the illusion that an eye was observing, an ear was listening, a mind was reflecting. And this illusion is broken by the insertion of mere necessary information. It might have been better, though still unsatisfactory, if the small amount of information which the reader needs had been quite woodenly inserted as occasional stage directions.

But the truth is that the technical difficulties of this method were insuperable for a writer of Virginia Woolf's single, highly concentrated poetic gift. All her novels suffer from her stylistic uniformity (and frequent stylistic idiosyncrasy), and from the homogeneity of atmosphere which results from it. Of course, it is true that there are more anthology passages in Virginia Woolf than in any other modern English novelist. They have been greatly quoted, for they exist splendidly out of their context, rich, supple, concentrated morsels of prose which are among the most beautiful ever written in English. But it is not *elastic* prose: it is perfect when it is appropriate, but it cannot adapt itself. And so there is not in the novels of Virginia Woolf that wonderful blending of manner and matter which is so notable in Flaubert, so brilliantly attempted by Joyce. This is nearly achieved in *To the Lighthouse*, the most successful, if perhaps the least ambitious, of the three purely experimental novels. But it is achieved by a fairly narrow limitation of subject. It is true that Tansley is a very different person from Mrs. Ramsay, but there is, as in this book there should be, a strong prevalent atmosphere. House, sea and garden effectively influence all the characters and subdue their language to approximately the same pitch. But in *The Waves* we are provided with several of the extremes of English upper middle-class life—the City, the farm, the ballroom and the academic study. Here again Joyce would have gloried in making apposite stylistic contrasts: he might have failed and tumbled into parody by way of an escape. But the attempt would have been made, and rightly made. In Virginia Woolf, on the other hand,

the language and atmosphere are almost uniform throughout. What is seen is different; what it is felt is different, but it is not enough merely to state variety in the same tone.

That brilliant and perceptive apologist, Mrs. Joan Bennett, has declared that all the characters in *The Waves* are 'endowed with an idiom suited to the expression of a subtle self-awareness', and that Virginia Woolf 'denies herself a differentiated style in thought or speech'. This is very bold pleading, but I cannot think that the self-denial was anything but involuntary. Nowhere in the novels have we any evidence that she was capable of a real stylistic variety. And what, indeed, would be served by such an act of self-denial? Mrs. Bennett claims that the purpose is to communicate 'with profound insight and discriminating exactness experiences which are widespread and produce in the reader a sense of recognition'. This is a good enough definition of what all good novelists try to do, but it is hard to see why uniformity of style should aid in its achievement. And there is no reason why 'subtle self-awareness' should demand always the same kind of expression. Adolphe, Julien Sorel, Frédéric Moreau, Marcel, Daedalus—all were subtly self-aware, but they do not approximate to any ideal mode of self-expression. They are different: their vision is different and their means of expression are different.

Genuine variety of tone is among the rarest qualities in novelists. Indeed, Tolstoy, Flaubert, Proust (for all his idiosyncrasies of style) and Joyce are perhaps alone in having achieved it to any effective degree. But there is an extreme of monochrome where Virginia Woolf and Henry James stand almost alone. Emerging from *The Waves* or *To the Lighthouse*, we do not feel that we have travelled. We have dwelt for a little in a stationary world, a world of entrancing twilight or dawn, misty or clear, but always subdued. It might be argued that we have indeed escaped from time and confusion; but I doubt whether the escape can be made by mere immobility. Heaven knows, one would not complain that the social field is too narrow, or that concentration camps receive no mention. Any field can be wide enough, even the orbit of a solitary duchess; but a single life is itself a confusion, a turmoil, a variegation of colour and temperature, ugliness and beauty. Do we feel that Virginia Woolf has faced the turmoil and subdued it, or that she has only paid lip-service to it, gliding elusively past it to her private garden? Certainly, there are

moments when she confronts nightmare with courage and great insight. The madness of Septimus Warren-Smith in *Mrs. Dalloway* leaps startlingly out of that rather unsatisfactory book and fills us with an anguish which we feel, perhaps, nowhere else in the novels. Significantly it is accompanied by a bitter and sardonic invective against the complacent philistinism of the doctors, and another rare note has been struck. The death of Percival, although treated monochromatically, is another passage which creates that profound uneasiness without which catharsis is impossible. But on the whole it is catharsis that the reader of Virginia Woolf must feel to have escaped him. When we have finished a great novel we have indeed made a journey, not through time or space, but through the wild confusion of human experience. The work is composed, so to speak, on a series of subdominants, that painful note which cries out for the scale's completion. Only at the end is the dominant struck, the suspense ended, the confusion resolved. Virginia Woolf has herself expressed this with great intellectual power in *To the Lighthouse*. Throughout the book Lilly Briscoe has been painting a picture. At the very end: 'She looked at the steps: they were empty; she looked at her canvas; it was blurred. With a sudden intensity, as if she saw it clear for a second, she drew a line there, in the centre. It was done; it was finished. Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision.' We do indeed feel, finishing this book, or *The Waves*, that order and harmony have been achieved. But we feel, perhaps, that they have been achieved by disregarding their opposite. Lilly Briscoe's failure to finish the picture in the first part of the book is an effective symbol. But it does not correspond to anything more than the factual incompleteness of the book itself. As a matter of fact, the first part could stand alone; it is complete in itself; a pattern and a statement have been made. The second part adds another pattern, a further statement, but it was not *demand*ed as we demand, for instance, the final retirement of Fabrice into the Charterhouse.

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Virginia Woolf was a lyrical poet with a passionate interest in the nature of artistic creation. This intellectual obsession drove her to the novel, and the intellectual content of her novels is always the same. One might almost say that the novels are treatises

on the problem of artistic creation, clothed in poetic speech. It is significant, for example, that Bernard, the writer, increasingly dominates *The Waves* until that last section which is awarded to him alone. The other characters are mainly poetic decorations hung around the central figure of a self-conscious artist. As statements of the artist's problem, the novels are admirable, but they do not themselves constitute a solution of the problem. They are invaluable textbooks for future novelists, and they will be constant sources of poetic delight to all feeling readers. But they are not successful novels.

## NICOLAS CALAS

# MAGIC ICONS

TO establish communication with a picture in our day it is necessary to own it. The profane atmosphere of museums with the endless cross-currents ceaselessly interrupting contemplation does not allow pictures to exorcise their spell. Modern communities cannot possess images the way a medieval parish possessed a Van der Weyden or a Grünewald when the picture was the centre of ceremonies. Now that works of art are no longer integrated in the life of a community it has become impossible to be possessed by pictures as of old. That is why works of art are devoid of magic and miraculous effects.

To rituals of mass and the contemplation of a work through prayer have succeeded mundane gatherings, or previews, during which artistic values are built up or demolished by favourable or adverse criticism of the artist's stroke of the brush. Virtuosity has replaced vision, the effort thus counting more than the result.

In a recent exhibition of the work of the late Mondrian the painting that attracted the most attention was an unfinished one still bearing the traces of the elaborate means employed by the artist to obtain that degree of abstraction which he aimed at. It was as if the scaffolding held more interest than the building itself—something possibly true when applied to the refurbishing of the ceiling of New York Grand Central Station but obviously invalid in the case of the Parthenon or the Cathedral of Rheims.

Under the influence of Museums, Art Books, Freudian Psychology, Gestalt Psychology, Morphology, art (in very small letters) is being hopelessly confused with history and identified with confession (or the need to reveal) as contrasted to revelation. The canvas instead of serving as material upon which the picture is to be painted becomes an integral part of the painting both in texture and colour; sometimes sand and other objects emphasize the effect.

In the period extending between the two wars vanguard painting was consciously experimental, subjective, historical and 'youthful'. An analysis of the development of forms and of the elaboration of the symbols of the unconscious became the golden mean for an iconological study of Matisse or Chirico.

If the same attitude towards art is pursued in the new post-war period we are now entering, then art criticism will probably continue expressing itself with the dullness characteristic of most of the recent writings in the field. Fortunately there are signs that a radical change might occur.

Art may outgrow its mundane preoccupations. Everything has been explored: the bourgeois home-space by the impressionists, the new interior by the cubists, the sartorial effect of colours by the fauves, the inner world of dreams by the surrealists. If Picasso towers above other artists it is because he borrowed from all schools and integrated their findings in his domain. Negro art, children's drawings, insanity, became with Picasso part of a worldly life.

The present crisis has inevitably grown out of the other-worldliness of the surrealists: What kind of existence is revealed by the exploration of the unconscious and the incongruous? The most recent work of Max Ernst and Yves Tanguy may possibly give an answer. Both these artists have achieved a psychological revolution which will affect our vision and restore hallucination to art. Their process is synthetic rather than analytical and in their best works the picture instead of eternally becoming is completed and can be detached from the artist. In a sense this marks a reversion from the unknowable picture (i.e., what does it mean?) to the unknown picture (i.e., I do not care who did it). Maturity is opposed to youth, existence to progress and development. The picture is adapted to vision; understanding must follow instead of preceding vision. What is expressed becomes more important than the intention, although the meaning contained is not rationally

comprehended but is communicated directly through affective drives. The picture is the essence of a reality that is felt through the mediation of inspiration. In an era of individualism the meaning of a picture is multiple and highly particularized instead of remaining typical and mythological in character, as are portraits representing the Holy Virgin or a patron saint. The product of an individual dream replaces the illustration of the Bible. The force of the work is therefore no more to be found in its universality but in the singularity and originality of a specific image. More than ever a picture is a composition of diverse elements that are integrated into a new whole, and it is the intensity achieved through integration and the syncretic force that account for its magnetic effect.

The problem, when studying the magic quality of paintings, is to discover their depth and multiple meanings. It is a matter of indifference whether the picture can be considered a masterpiece, whether it represents an individual or collective effort, or whether popular recognition has been bestowed on it. The final criterion is its power to communicate. Instead of scrutinizing a work for signs of cracking paint, it is needful to allow the picture to split one's soul with intense convulsions. To experiments and masterpieces one must oppose icons.

Due to the perceptive character inherent in painting and the concreteness of the image derived therefrom, pictorial art does not lend itself to a direct expression of abstract thought, which is the sole level where one can distinguish action from imagination. It is impossible, therefore, to say of a picture that because it is beautiful it is also good, but it is for the critic to assume the role of the poet and to cast the light of inspiration on its loftiness.

There are three departures for art criticism: the first one questions why a certain picture fails to be beautiful—a criticism that has a moral implication for the artist, as a recognition of failure is a condemnation; the second explains why a picture is beautiful—this is on the level of aesthetic judgement; the third, deriving from our need for the sublime, leads one towards those works which have the most disturbing effect.

It is in the nature of great pictures—the miracle-producing icons—to allow themselves to be used for both bad and good purposes: a flight into ecstasy or as means of communication with the world.



As the contact with works of art has to be direct, the only purpose of reproductions can be to orientate the reader toward a more immediate approach to it. It is the uniqueness, the oneness of great pictures that saves them from the vulgarity of popularity. They need to be protected instead of being exposed as is the custom today. Communications and miracles are exceptional events and a great work is not only something very rare but should be treated as such. Like poetry, good painting is used for hermetic purposes, a prerequisite of the miracle that turns the picture into a salutary image.

It is necessary to view the subject-matter of an icon primarily as an object rather than as a landscape or a portrait, which does not mean that there is no pictorial association between the thing in itself and a portrait or a landscape. On the contrary, psychological confusion and the syncretism of dreams, which is a prerequisite of magic, demand that objects be associated directly with a total conception of life, directly linked to our emotions and our ego. This is why magic objects are *in* nature and tied up to places or to living beings.

It is from the point of view of 'iconolatry' rather than iconology that a picture must be studied.

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The psychological question corresponding to the self-portrait is 'Who am I?' When we see a figure covered by a mask we instinctively ask 'Who is it?' In the age of individualism the mask does not symbolize an archetype, as was the case in the dances of the primitives or in the Greek or Japanese theatre, but it hides an individual. The two forms given by Max Ernst to the Sphinx are highly individualized in contrast to the anonymous characters who act in Chirico's pictures. Everything about the Grandee and the Dandy, as these two forms might be called, indicates individuals gifted with highly developed personalities.

In the portrait of the Dandy, called 'Gardenia', it is as if a window had been opened and we were allowed to look in unnoticed. We are struck by the cubist background turned into a surface three quarters abstract and one quarter baroque. Against it is projected the profile of an effeminate being bearing a distant resemblance to those pictures of personified flowers once so fashionable. But while those anthropomorphic flowers remained

purely formal Ernst's creature is intensely alive. At nearer view this monstrous dandy resembles a bird and an insect. Obviously Ernst enjoyed stressing the confusion suggested by different forms, thus giving to ambivalence an intrinsic 'naturalistic' meaning.

The most amazing feature about the new Ernst monster is its eye. Its spiral shape, so suggestive of the Duchamp 'eye', could be anything from a satire of the dandy's eye-glass to a nail screwed into the head. The identification of an eye with a nail is horrifying and, on the level of pictorial arts, equal to castration. Fortunately the threatening situation has been partly overcome by the monochrome and nocturnal colour of the picture, suggestive of a dream. The night-blue of universality is a balm to our over-exposed anxiety. Although this being is thrust upon us rather than placed in its own three-dimensional space, we can avoid its appalling proximity by waking up. Because the creature is close to us and ever drawing nearer, it produces an icon effect. This dandy could be worshipped, but by whom? This sphinx would cease to be itself if it thus betrayed its identity, revealing its most closely guarded secret. If we looked at the picture long enough the eye would start to turn, although this little experiment made popular by Gestalt psychology does not lead us very far. It may be satisfying to know that the gardenia is combined with the effeminate hand, but the pleasant or unpleasant feelings of movements only add to the hallucinatory effect. If monsters exist it is for them to convince us of the reality of their presence. We are reminded of Kafka's 'Metamorphosis': monsters have reappeared in art (not to be confused with disfigurations) and are terribly personal, as contrasted to the archetype character of mythological monsters. There is nothing taboo about Ernst's creatures and their sex-appeal gives them a romantic *beauté du diable* effect. It is because 'Gardenia' is the personification of the evil of nature (Sade versus Rousseau) that this picture is twentieth century in spirit.

The actuality of Ernst's preoccupation is better understood if we realize the lack of all archaism in the representation of the monstrous, which is naturally a tribute to his inexhaustible imagination. What could be more actual, from an aesthetic point of view, than the background, with its oscillation from the desert of abstraction to the dampness of the saturated sylvan life? Modern,

too, in the Baudelairean sense, is the Dandy's viciousness. How deep must be the plunge of those who have been overcome by vertigo and carried into the labyrinthine profundity of that enchanting eye! Without paying an exorbitant price for our temerity can we ever hope to discover the secret of that mind? A curtain may fall over the window, or we can turn away, but the spell has been cast and those among the chosen will carry away the image that so unexpectedly visited them.

If after the 'Gardenia' we look at the Grandee 'Euclid'—the mystery deepens. Here, too, the revolt against futile abstractions is apparent. Euclid's baroque costume, so reminiscent of portraits by Holbein—unless it is a reactivation of the child's vision of its grandmother—is a challenge to Euclidean geometry and the use of it made by cubism and abstract art. As for the fig leaf taken off an ancient statue and turned into a mask, it adds a satirical and 'venetian' note to the violent anti-classical spirit of the picture. Caught between the sea of unidentified dreams and a fragrance of life the Euclidean conception appears singularly limited and antiquated. For the contemporaries of Einstein, art should go beyond purely plastic limitations and the aestheticism of Greek geometers.

When confronted with masked figures we are not interested to know what they see but what they will say. The emphasis is on the mouth. However, the lips of these two sphinxes are sealed with a sexual secret; they are the victims of an anti-Lisa obsession and cannot smile. What makes their presence so disturbing is a sense of guilt emanating from them. Why would one wish to know what they say if one were not oneself so terribly uneasy? Confessions never saved anybody and analysis only killed creation. These pictures exist through a terrific force of concentration. Max Ernst has at last achieved in mastering. We can have great confidence in an artist who rises above the sea level of infantile dreams and emerges with his powerful anthropomorphism as one of the most profound interpreters of the world of our time. What saves his abstract pictures from falling into the aridity of conventional non-figurative art is the realistic outcome of his abstract experiments. He will turn the squares of Mondrian into windows and fill them with images; while Matta's adventures in perspective will be reduced to decorative elements of realistic pictures.

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Finally a cube or a pyramid is covered by a hat decorated by realistic roses.

If we willed strongly enough, the rose would grow out of water, and in the metronome of our brain—suggested by the pyramidal representation of the head—we would feel the pulsation of life carried by tidal waves. Nevertheless, there is no answer to our anxiety, and in our quest for conscious meanings there is no reason to drown ourselves by plunging too far into the unconscious. There is no answer, and all that is needful is the intense concentration such as art seldom achieves, and then only by appealing to forces that combine in a supreme effort—baroque and abstract, night and day, history and reality, dream and mythical reminiscences—thus giving life that powerful animistic interpretation where plants and human beings, insects, birds and fishes are found in the ever-changing appearances of existence as opposed to the death-like rigidity of pure abstraction.



When the picture we are looking at is a landscape the natural question to ask is 'Where is it?' But when looking at Tanguy's 'La Rapidité des sommeils' we ask 'Where are we?' As opposed to the profane landscape of Corot or Cézanne, Tanguy's painting carries us into the picture. We are no more in front of it for we are 'there'. In terms of icons the landscape is primarily 'a place called Golgotha, that is to say, a place of the skull'. In the place called Golgotha we see Christian totem-poles. In the post-Christian world the totems of Tanguy have lost the Euclidean simplicity of the cross. The title of his other picture, 'Divisibilité Indéfinie', is characteristic of the need to express the intangible and to escape from reality.

For years Yves Tanguy dwelt in solitude, but now he has so familiarized himself with the land he brought into existence that he is no more afraid to approach the objects he sees. He examines them with the utmost care. They are not as fearful as one might have expected, and although strange they can be integrated into our world. Like pebbles, they have been formed by a deep sea. The tide, with the help of the wind we see whirling in the distance, has shaped them into weird patterns. With what rapidity the sleep of centuries must have gone by! The memory of an obelisk stands in the foreground—unless it is a petrified mast. Three small

egg-shaped dice remind one of the omnipresence of chance and, as I recollect the red and white bone-like objects painted with that care Tanguy excels in, the vividness of the picture becomes obsessive. Where is this Golgotha? What gives rise to those dreams? His objects could be turned into statues or into jewels but they are primarily totem-poles or fetishes fashioned from material chosen with the utmost care. The biomorphic form of each piece and the asymmetric aspect of the construction convinces us of its reality.

Here at last we have a solution to Lautreamont's now-famous problem of association. Tanguy overcame the ghastly awkwardness of umbrellas and sewing-machines by creating biomorphic appearances for ready-made objects. (Max Ernst once showed in his house in New York the close resemblance between a Brancusi statue and a propeller—an idea which both the Museum of Modern Art and *Fortune Magazine* were quick in picking up. Max Ernst had understood that the function of both was to be exposed to the wind: in other words, he discovered their common denominator.) An Indian totem-pole and the remarkable balance of that strange object in 'Divisibilité Indéfinie' suggest magic relationships artists are always the first to discover. Tanguy's nocturnal totem-poles are the last inventions of the animistic spirit. His polyhedric constructions—ininitely more fascinating than Giacometti's—carry us to worlds where we feel with equal force the presence of an ossified past, the actuality of dehumanized places, and the ferocious grandeur of palaeolithic insect-forms. How wonderful it must be in this desert of fascination to discover the ground covered with magic filters! These proto-historic bowls have been filled with the beverage that will—at this hour of the setting sun—quench our thirst after endless wanderings. What intense narcissism and what proud satisfaction the artist must have felt after completing his extraordinary totemic construction to identify himself with it and admire his ego both in the light of the liquid reflection and in the intense darkness of the shadow! Truly the divisibility is infinite. Out of the fur-like crater a melting image is revealed, the complementary contrary of a self of shadows and stones of dreams and realities.

With his demiurgic power (egocentrism) the artist calls upon inspiration (compulsion) to model for him objects that reassure us of an existence innocent of slavery and labour. Tanguy knows how

to create that objectivity which the utilitarian denies and the mystic castrates in the hour of ecstasy.

Here again, as in all important works of art, we are confronted with the problem of guilt. It is a fundamental one for the understanding of existence. In the landscape of ancestral totem-poles, of crosses, of memorials, we ask, 'Where are we?' Tanguy answers, 'Here—in the midst of things'. Only the weak will doubt. They cannot believe that they are treading on firm ground when they are following him and they are afraid of drowning in their dreams. For the weak it is a liquescent world because they fail to understand the intense process of condensation which has taken place; the magic of this reality escapes them. They likewise remain blind to the wilful confusion created by the daring combination of fossilized forms and the polymorphic constructions. It is a totemic synthesis that could not have been discovered in Alaska or in Mantegna's world. It is a post-Christian Golgotha, a totem-pole made out of psychological skulls, and it is with great self-confidence that the artist has rooted his cross in the ground. He is free!

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The recognition of magic icons involves rejection of those works which, although beautiful, are not inspiring. It is because these icons are magic instead of being Christian that they are totemic rather than human, materialist rather than spiritual. Magic as it is now generally understood means that according to the principle *in pars pro toto* the wand can replace the magician, the symbol can be substituted to the symbolized. In Tanguy's icons the objects will stand for magic enigmas yet to be apprehended, for we live in an era in which, in art, the individual precedes the general.

From an iconological point of view the choice of works by Max Ernst and Yves Tanguy has been determined by their strong classic tendency. Although surrealism as a whole belongs intrinsically, via romanticism, to the baroque tradition, it is from a purely pictorial point of view a reaction to the angular baroque of cubism and a return to a classical approach to an image. Baroque magic icons may be painted in the future. Their non-existence so far can be attributed to the fact that they have not yet been created and that Chirico classicism precedes baroque polymorphism. As icons correspond to an animistic phase of development it might be questioned if the multiview aspect of baroque

pictorial composition is compatible with animism. Neither dreams nor the vision of children can ever be considered pictorially as polymorphic. However, this argument is not a conclusive one, as a baroque point of view could be integrated in the animistic interpretation of life of a highly complex egocentric adult.

There are two painters working now in America whose attitude is definitely baroque: Pavel Tchelitchev and Kurt Seligmann. All other considerations aside, the multiple meanings that Tchelitchev gives to his images demand an intellectual appreciation which precludes an immediate communion. It would be as if a prayer could be written in the style of *Finnegans Wake*. The wilful elaboration of several layers of meaning reminiscent of certain forms of Chinese art is an expression of a mandarin tendency and is intellectual rather than animistic. In Seligmann the invocation of magic is strong, nevertheless his figures, owing to their restlessness and their extravert attitude, evoke action rather than anxiety. Unlike Ernst and Tanguy the emphasis is not on guilt and on 'being' but on 'becoming' and transformation. Following up the Chirico tradition it can be said that while Ernst personalized the mystery of creatures, while Tanguy explored the far end of a railway journey, Seligmann drafted mannequins to fight for a magic cause.

Pictorially the choice of the paintings under review has been determined by colour considerations. The surrealist colours are the carnal red and the blue, evocative of horizons and nocturnal life. Blue dominates the dream landscape of Tanguy and the 'interior' of Ernst's Dandy. All colour is lost in 'Euclid', for this grandee lives in the darkness of his enigma and is surrounded by the white of blankness and the deathlike whiteness of clowns. The importance of determining the predominant colours for an historical appreciation of art is unquestionable since Spengler treated the subject so brilliantly in his *Decline of the West*. It is the combination of red and blue in Miro and their metamorphosis into magenta by Matta that play an essential role in forming the surrealist atmosphere these painters breathe in. Criticism should be inspired, poetic rather than analytical, but this method can only be used when the work transcends the aesthetic and becomes inspiring. To the painter can be applied Eluard's *le poète est celui qui inspire*.

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To further elucidation of the character of modern magic it is interesting to study a painting such as Wilfredo Lam's 'The Jungle'. This picture is not an icon and is closer to the Picasso manner than to Chirico, but no other living painter is so directly dependent on the art of primitive people and so close to the collective aspect of early magic as is this artist who did not develop exclusively in the tradition of western individualism. Lam's 'Jungle' is an individualistic interpretation of mythical reminiscences. Whereas for a 'Roman' Picasso all things are integrated in a pantheistic universe, Lam is 'Hebraic' in his monotheistic exclusivism.

One might see a line of development from the aesthetic quality of Lam's collective magic to the loftiness of magic icons. But this is fictitious. Nevertheless, the use of fictions, as the jurists of old knew so well, is very helpful in comprehending a total cultural situation, legal or artistic.

When and where will the faces be unmasked? Who are the heroes who will spill their blood? The answer is still a Jungle secret. As I recall it vividly, Wilfredo Lam's 'Jungle' was primarily blue because he overcame the contradiction light-colour. It was oppressive because there is no reason to feel free in the Jungle. It was plastic because its economy of form was superb; it was intelligent because the mind had mastered the most advanced methods of linear and colour composition; it was human because Lam has felt, as no one before him, the simultaneity of negro art with the contemporary life of the tropics. Unlike Gauguin, Lam is not exotic but is forcing himself with energy—so well illustrated in the 'Laocoon', that model for art critics—to free himself from the living knots that chain a man to the fate of his family, to the fate of his race. There is magic in Lam's 'Jungle' because we feel that an oceanic depth stretches beyond the hidden faces and the hidden trees, the blues and the totemic lines of primitive and intellectual life.

For those who live under the Sign of Separation it is profoundly encouraging to achieve communion, however brief, with magic icons. It is still more encouraging that communion takes place *NOW*. Uprooted from the land of their strongest anthropomorphic associations—land of childhood and confusion between dream and reality—artists, powerful enough to re-establish new relationships on a very high level of condensation, on a plane

where both submission to the past and the present has been successfully avoided, force their way to creation.

The Jungle, the Desert, the Mask could be anywhere, anywhere where those who live in Rome or Babylon yearn for a radical change. When the figures are unmasked, when out of the jungle new forces emerge, then the place of sacrifice will be revealed to us—the new Golgotha.

Today blood transformed into the corrosive force of paint tears us with magic visions; tomorrow the poison will dissolve again into the red liquid that will be spilt anew over the altars of our hopes.

*BERNARD WALL*

## SOME CONTEMPORARY ITALIAN WRITERS

THERE is a sense in which writers in Italy did not suffer so badly during the war as their counterparts in England. While Fascism, especially during its last years, during the 'Axis' period, cast a blight over literature, the Italians never really waged a total war; military conscription was very much less rigidly applied than in England, and there was no civil conscription. After the restoration of Mussolini and the German occupation, things became much worse. Nine out of ten educated Italians were now against Fascism and only longed for the arrival of the Allies. The German labour drives and the Gestapo manhunts drove many writers into hiding. The arrival of the Allies was followed in town after town by an outburst of literary, as well as political, activity. Things stored up for twenty years could now be said. One difficulty was, of course, economic. Italy at the best of times has a restricted reading public, and it is very difficult for writers to live by their profession or art unless their work is translated into other languages or they exhaust themselves in journalism. But this difficulty is at least a familiar one to which Italians are well accustomed. Worse in its way was the isolation from the rest of the world, the difficulty of getting foreign books and periodicals and of finding out what was being written and thought abroad. When I left

Rome some six months ago the second difficulty was by no means remedied. A few volunteers who tried to develop cultural relations, and several energetic representatives of the British Council, seemed to have against them an immense tradition of official Anglo-Saxon indifference to ideas. Indeed, a handful of Frenchmen attached to the French Embassy in Rome were in a better position to provide books than the vast bureaucracies of Americans and Englishmen. There is question here of two different traditions regarding the export of objects of culture. The mania for serious English writing, not mere propaganda, was almost grotesque. The few books one could get had queues of borrowers. One was questioned to exhaustion about Mr. Eliot's *Four Quartets*, about Joyce, about Virginia Woolf, about who was writing what. Often, I imagine, the books Italians wanted were out of print here.

The end of Fascism, of course, is such a turning point in Italian life, and hence of writing, that it would be idle to forecast in any detail what may develop in a few years' time. All the interdependent factors are fluid.

The most outstanding Fascist writer, who was in many ways the inventor and propagator of the Fascist 'style', was Gabriele D'Annunzio. D'Annunzio died in the middle 'thirties, but he had ceased to be an influence on the younger generations of writers, taken as a whole, long before his death. In spirit he was in some ways a counterpart of the decadents of the English 'nineties. To the decadents he was related by his preciosity and emphasis on form more than content, and by his macabre sexuality. His novels, with their rhetorical and yet mummified heroes, are almost unreadable nowadays, though some Italian critics, for instance Emilio Cecchi, have admired his later prose poems, *La Leda senza Cigno* and *Notturmo*, which are certainly more sincere and pure than his novels and plays. As a poet he was extremely uneven. He was capable of writing resounding phrases as tired and dead as the *bric-à-brac* he collected in his houses. Sometimes one is reminded of Swinburne and sometimes of bad Shelley—less the moralizing. On the other hand *Alcyone*, a collection of lyrics expressing a pantheistic identification of Man with Nature rare in Italy, and written with Dionysiac energy, must live, I think, as a landmark in the last fifty years of Italian poetry.

Another writer who is often classified as 'Fascist' is Giovanni

Papini, who has now disappeared from the public world and lost nearly all influence. Papini's best work was undoubtedly the desperate and passionately sincere *Uomo finito*, which preceded his conversion to Catholicism. His later religious books, the *Vita di Cristo* and *San Agostino*—to mention two—have a tang of egoism which often makes religious readers uneasy. Like nearly all Papini has written, save some heavy and angry satire, they are slightly autobiographical. Perhaps Papini was more successful in his long essay on Dante—*Dante vivo*—because, though that contained hazardous assertions from a scholar's point of view, in the polemical and bitter temperament of Dante, his fellow Florentine, Papini, found something of his own feelings which he could express.

Less vital than Papini is another Tuscan, Ardengo Soffici, who, after many changes of outlook, ended up in the last years with a glorification of Roman order and classical measure as the alternative to Moscow, which, as an ideology, recalls that of the French writers Maurice Barrès and Charles Maurras. Soffici has almost a Nietzschean skill for writing terse and penetrating *pensées*.

A contemporary who has inherited much from D'Annunzio is Curzio Malaparte. Malaparte was once imprisoned by the Fascists after he had published, in French, an attack on the regime under the title *Technique d'un Coup d'État*. Later he made his peace with Mussolini, and during the war he travelled Europe as a newspaper correspondent and as a man nominally of Fascist sympathies. After the liberation of Rome he published one of Italy's most recent best sellers: *Kaput*. This book is unusually light and readable. It contains accounts of personal experiences in Sweden and amongst the Ciano set at the Acqua Santa golf course near Rome, which are surely touched up and suggest a comparison (for verisimilitude) with Axel Munthe's *Story of San Michele*: and there are Russian plains and villages under Axis occupation which recall the Russia of Frederick Prokosch. Malaparte's zest for life is enjoyable but he would be more impressive if one did not feel a lack of principle and of depth in his outlook. Politics, one feels, is a means for the self-projection of Malaparte—and this is typically D'Annunzian. A rival to Malaparte as a best seller is Paolo Monelli, whose *Roma '43* is a more serious and historical work—a detailed picture of one city under the German terror.

D'Annunzio's most constant critic, and patient or impatient enemy of much that D'Annunzianism stood for, is Benedetto

Croce, who still remains the strongest intellectual personality in the whole country. Croce's philosophical hegemony was contested by Giovanni Gentile—the other great neo-Hegelian who, perhaps more consistently than Croce, saw the fulfilment of neo-Hegelian politics in the Fascist State. But there are few subjects not discussed in Croce's massive and numerous volumes, and even as a critic of art and literature—not to mention his historical work—the Neapolitan Encyclopædist is not easily rivalled. On Croce as a literary critic has fallen the mantle of his fellow-Neapolitan De Sanctis. His work on literature spreads through a dozen volumes and evaluates not only Italian writers but also the classics and French, German, English, and even Spanish masterpieces.

Croce is not above criticism to the younger generation, and to some he has been rather like the old man of the sea, from whose influence it is difficult to subtract oneself, and who paralyses independent movements and fresh life. As a literary critic, Croce is very one-sided. His moral preoccupations help him to dismiss rather cavalierly much of the best French work of the last hundred years. His favourites are Ariosto and Goethe. He has no understanding for the inner spiritual tension of poets such as Baudelaire and Rimbaud, and this means that contemporary poetry is very largely beyond his ken. Partly owing to his age and partly because he has lived nearly all his life in Naples, which is a town suburban to the stream of modern history, he does not grasp the real agony of modern metropolitan souls. Hence his views on art, like his old-fashioned liberalism and optimism (and his blindness to religious forces, to the inevitability of radical social change and to the implications of modern technics and totalitarian tendencies) contribute little to help young creative writers. Like other great men Croce acts as a hindrance to those who come after him. It would be easier to escape from his influence were there anybody else in Italy of his intellectual stature, or who even approached his knowledge and vitality. There is not. And twenty years of Fascism, with the barriers it imposed on the exchange of ideas between Italy and other countries, had the paradoxical result of strengthening in some ways the domination over minds of this unrelenting opponent of the regime. Bergsonism never really penetrated into Italy though its influence on contemporary French ideas was almost incalculable. The reflections of the neo-Thomist

revival abroad were pale indeed. Kierkegaard, the Existentialists and Blondel's philosophy of Action are known only to very few Italians.

Finally, one of Croce's bequests to Italian prose writers was the double-edged weapon of the abstract Hegelian jargon. This could be used by Fascists and Marxists alike, and it is a strange bedfellow for historical Liberalism. It gives an appearance of intellectualism and profundity to journalistic articles, but it often serves to hide confusion and unrealism of thought. Vital words are concrete words, at least where literary style is concerned, and this abstracted scholastic word-play begets exhaustion in the reader and a feeling of deadness. In this, as so often happens with great men, it is not Croce himself who is at fault but his imitators and followers. Croce remains a huge and almost isolated personality, a human landmark.

It has rather oddly happened that when one speaks of contemporary Italian writers of the younger generation, peoples' minds in England and America fix immediately on one name alone—that of Ignazio Silone, the author of *Fontamara* and *Pane e Vino*. For it is not at all in this way that Italians see things. That Silone is not very well known in Italy can be ascribed to the Fascist ban on his books, and his long exile. But most of the leading critics in Italy do not consider he is a good writer. Arguments about Silone between Italians and foreigners are thus always arising. Italians maintain he has no style or a hideous style. Moreover, they maintain that no Italian who knows the Abruzzi can fail to detect the falseness of Silone's picture.<sup>1</sup> I mention this, not to attack Silone, who seems to me a writer of power and pathos, and one, moreover, of deep religious feeling. Part of the explanation of this disagreement must surely lie in the fact that Silone has developed in an entirely different way from his contemporaries who remained in Italy. He is vitalist rather than intellectual, a prophet rather than a philosopher, he has religious feeling and moral passion rather than rationalism and scepticism, and he plays on crude and simple

<sup>1</sup> My own impression, for what it is worth, is that Silone's shepherds and villagers are about as 'real' as the Provençaux in the novels of Jean Giono. Silone has, to my mind, more in common with Giono than with Malraux with whom he has been compared. Giono's townsmen are decadent and corrupt, and not unlike Silone's Fascists. Giono reacted against all mechanized society towards agrarian anarchism, whereas Silone reacted against Fascism and man crucifying man to spiritual regeneration through love. Silone has something in common with Fogazzaro's *Il Santo*. He was once a Communist, but has abandoned all links with that party with which he has a bitter feud. Politically his views are now largely akin to those of the British Labour Party. He is far more devoted to public activity than to literature, and he is now editor of the Rome Socialist daily paper *Avanti!*

rather than sophisticated and subtle motives. He is thus out of tune with the sensibility of most Italian writers now, though this does not mean that he has not something very important to contribute.

What I have written about Silone is not quite clear, but I think I can explain further what I mean by turning to a novelist of the younger generation in Italy who is generally more widely read and highly thought of than Silone—Alberto Moravia. Moravia, who is now only thirty-seven or thirty-eight, began writing very early, and his precocious novel *Gli Indifferenti* was rightly considered, when it appeared, an astonishing *tour de force* of disillusion. But Moravia's disillusion has no windows. It is that of a corrupt world and of a tired and effete civilization. He has transferred out of Sicily something of Giovanni Verga's realism. Cupidity, lovelessness, peeling houses, dead chromium plate and hideous virtues, and the drains of life, help to make Moravia's attacks on the Italian middle classes almost social documents. Moravia has experimented in Kafka and surrealism, but Kafka is far away from the intellectual and rationalist temper of the Italian mind and climate, and I think his most substantial work, apart from *Gli Indifferenti*, is *Le Ambizioni Sbagliate* (1935). I would also like to mention his latest long short-story *Agostino*, based on the troubled and morbid sexuality of adolescence. Sexuality plays a dominant part in Moravia's novels, but it is treated with realist penetration into subtler motives. This shows how far the reaction has gone from D'Annunzio's perverted and 'heroic' love dramas.

The problems of society in Moravia's novels are despair, boredom and squalour. The reader may not unnaturally ask whether there is a way out. Moravia recently wrote a pamphlet, *La Speranza*, in which he compared the position, with regard to society, of Communism now and that of Christianity in the third and fourth centuries. The masses, he argues, now as then, have no hope. Communism now, as Christianity then, might provide enough hope to make life worth living. Moravia is not, himself, a Communist, and if I interpret him rightly he would compare the painful position of civilized Europeans now with that of late Roman pagans who saw the rising tide of the Christian revolution with dismay—for instance the poet Claudian. One can reply to this thesis that Communism has most of the symptoms of Western bourgeois decay, and does not even begin to be different enough to give hope, which is spiritual. I have cited *La Speranza*, however,



to show how far Moravia's Italy is from Silone's, and how much nearer this kind of outlook is to that of the sophisticated Huxley, for instance, at least to the Huxley of *Brave New World*. It is also typical of something more general in Italy that Moravia should have found Petronius very illuminating. Few who knew Rome in the last days of Fascism before the war could help being reminded of the world of the *Satyricon*, for the pompous and vulgar *nouveaux riches* were so very like Trimalchio with his whores and sycophants, and the house Mussolini built for his mistress Petacci on Monte Mario had fittings which made it very like Trimalchio's villa.

If Petronius is a writer who seems still very 'actual' in contemporary Italy, this is because, with all the changes of two thousand years, there remains a modicum of continuity with the classical world, and certain types of sensibility can keep reappearing in Italy for which, as it were, the Greek and Roman gods seem needed as a projection. In Italy the Renaissance went far deeper than in other countries, and one's mind can never escape from the immensity of its visible heritage or from the ruins of the earlier Mediterranean world-civilization. No writer more illustrates the interweaving of Mediterranean constants and the changing forms of modern European expression than Alberto Savinio. Savinio, whose other name is Andrea De Chirico, is less well known outside Italy than his brother Giorgio De Chirico, for whom painting has been almost exclusively the means of expression. In a way it is difficult to separate the two brothers, as Jean Cocteau once remarked, for Savinio has expressed in autobiography, essays and short stories what his brother has expressed in painting.<sup>1</sup>

In one sense, Savinio is more typical of Italy than Moravia, for he is almost a pure intellectual and lives in the sceptical play of the mind. As he is a writer with a wide background of classical as well as French and German literature, it is difficult to speak of influences. His books are studded with allusions, especially Greek ones. He owes a good deal to Apollinaire, whom he frequented as a young man in Paris as Apollinaire's years were becoming numbered, also to such diverse figures as Collodi (the author of *Pinocchio*), Jules Verne and Paracelsus.

<sup>1</sup> Works by Savinio worth singling out are: *Il Capitano Ulisse* (1934, a play), *Infanzia di Nivasio Dolcemare* (impressions of childhood, 1941), *Narrate Uomini la vostra Storia* (biographical essays, 1942), *Casa 'La-Vita'* (short stories, 1943), *Ascolto il tuo cuore Città* (a panegyric on many aspects of Milan, 1943).

Even more marked is the influence of Stendhal (the *Chartreuse de Parme* ought surely to be coupled with the *Satyricon* as a guide book to social life amongst many of the wealthy in Italy), and, of course, Nietzsche. But most constant influence of all is the memory of boyhood in Athens entangled with Greek mythology in an inextricable experience, the *Odyssey* and the substantial De Chirico family with a mother of iron and a father who was a pioneer of engineering—the subject of the *Infanzia di Nivasio Dolcemare*. Such a background explains perhaps why in Savinio the gods keep reappearing in different contemporary and inconsequent disguises, drop in for a cup of coffee or sit down for a chat in an armchair, or inanimate objects become personalized and talk in thin intellectual tones. I do not wish to imply that the gods have much in common with Blake's angels, for they are defined intellectual creations. Savinio moves about in the new electro-plated Rome, down streets where the houses have statues on the roofs, the streets of the early De Chirico painting. Savinio also paints in a sceptical and satirical manner. Piranesi is very present in this De Chirico universe—the Piranesi who saw the essence of Rome with an almost sinister massing of busts and statues which seem to be conversing, living and shedding ichor from their cracks.

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In no field is the reaction against the grandiloquent and rhetorical style of the bad Renaissance tradition—and of D'Annunzio and the Fascists—more apparent than amongst contemporary Italian poets. What happened, of course, was that by the time the rhetoric of the end of the last century and the beginning of this had penetrated to a crowd of cynical journalists, the serious writers had perceived its ravages and, almost unknown to the public, they were working along different lines akin to those of the French. There were men influential in the Fascist regime who were by no means without taste, who were well able to distinguish valuable from insincere work. It is true that F. T. Marinetti, the more astonishing than solid founder of Futurism, who was never thought to be a very serious figure in his own country, was singled out for honour by the regime. On the other hand, architecture was more tastefully fostered in Italy than in England, as is testified by the *novecento* (concrete and glass) edifices along the banks of the Tiber in the new quarters beyond the Castel Sant' Angelo and in

Parioli. The poetry of Giuseppe Ungaretti was also encouraged in a discerning mood.<sup>1</sup> Ungaretti's slight and limpid style, his control and elimination of words, all recall the poet's French schooling—Rimbaud, Apollinaire, Max Jacob, for instance. Paul Valéry, who is nearer in temper to the Italians than to the Anglo-Saxons, also occurs to mind.

But nearer in some ways to Valéry than Ungaretti is Eugenio Montale. Like Ungaretti, Montale depends rather on subtlety and the manipulation of words to wring from them the last drops of meaning, than on power. Like Ungaretti, Montale is essentially a difficult poet of hyper-civilization. It is apparent in the post-impressionistic landscapes, cities and waters under evening light of his two slight volumes of verse—*Le Occasioni* and *Ossa di Sepia*—that he has wrestled with words over years as Mr. Eliot has done. He has studied Eliot, at least in early phases. Both Montale and Ungaretti lack the definite tension between Christian values and contemporary society, which is a touchstone of Eliot's recent work, and they lack social interests. There is a certain exquisite *lacrymae rerum* instead. But I will return to this point. Meanwhile, one other poet I need to mention in this inadequate catalogue is Umberto Saba, a Jew, and by profession in normal times a dealer in fine-art books in Trieste. Being an Italian, a Jew, and a Triestino is no fortunate combination in this time of fanaticism. Saba has sought refuge in Rome. As a Triestino brought up in the days of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Saba partakes of German rather than of French culture, and has echoes of the Germans from Nietzsche to Rilke. His work appears more straightforward, less 'hermetic' than that of Ungaretti and Montale, and at times recalls Pascoli and the nineteenth century. This straightforwardness is partly illusory, I think, as it is with Rilke, and simplicity in Saba is combined with a delicate over-sensitive sensibility which—as has also been said of Proust—he owes partly to his Jewish heritage.

<sup>1</sup> The Fascist *Gerarca* Giuseppe Bottai, for a long time Minister of Education, gave the impression of being more intelligent and cultivated than the others. In the help he gave to writers and artists he seems to have shown genuine taste. Count Ciano was also by no means without taste. Ungaretti unfortunately once dedicated some poems to Mussolini. He obtained a literary lectureship in Rio and later in Rome. Last year his case was up before the Italian epuration authorities, but I have not since heard how it was finally settled. I sincerely hope that moderation and good sense prevailed at a nervous time. Outraged Italian feelings demand epuration on a large scale, but there is always a danger that jealousy, or the desire to hide something oneself, lies behind demands for excessive 'purity', especially, perhaps, amongst Italian literary men and artists.

In a short essay such as this, I have picked out a certain number of writers in what may appear to be an arbitrary way. I have omitted such established writers as Emilio Cecchi, Massimo Bontempelli, Aldo Palazzeschi, Riccardo Bacchelli and Antonio Baldini. I have also omitted Vittorini, whose *Conversazioni in Sicilia* has been claimed to be the most remarkable novel in the last twenty years in Italy; and the work of two other writers of value, Barrili and Corrado Alvaro. Alvaro, a Southerner, is almost rough and granitic as Italian writers go, and shows signs of reaction against the older generation in his concern about political and social questions. His *L'Uomo è forte*, published in the 'thirties, is a description of psychological reactions in a terrifying police state. At the time of its publication it was officially understood to be an attack on the Soviet regime, and the general background is undoubtedly Russian. Readers, however, gathered that Alvaro also had Fascism very much in mind. Similar methods of evading censorship were common practice for twenty years. Alvaro was an active publicist during the period immediately after the first overthrow of Mussolini and lived in hiding during the German occupation.

But to return to the centre block of established men to whom I have already referred. Emilio Cecchi, a Tuscan, who shares with Mario Praz leadership in knowledge of English literature and manners, represents very well the writer with the exquisite style. Cecchi, like Palazzeschi, is, I think, a Tuscan constant. His outlook is fundamentally epicurean, and literature is to him a different affair from politics and social responsibilities. He was an academician in recent years, and he now contributes frequent literary articles to the Rome Liberal daily paper—which incidentally is the best written political newspaper in Italy—the *Risorgimento Liberale*. His judgements on contemporary English literature are sound, and his taste is precise and very pure. Literature is the art of the beautiful—the *bello*—and he does not appear to be subject to the tensions and stresses of recent French, English and American writing. A similar absence of the religious, social and political tensions is the most striking thing to a foreigner about other writers of the established generation I have mentioned. Exquisitely civilized, they seem to have missed any passionate experience of the crisis in almost every field of our common civilization. This gives one an impression of classical tranquillity, but also of slightness.

While it is unwise to prophesy, there are signs that the younger generations are in reaction against these classical stylists and humanists. There is a significant trend towards radical politics exemplified in the young Communists, and also in the Christians of the Left, who are Catholic revolutionaries. An exceedingly able critic who has become almost eaten up with political and social questions is Giacomo De Benedetti.

The Italian literary public is more intellectual, more sceptical of values, more civilized, and more polished than its British and American counterpart, and up to a point still seems to be living in an age which has clearly passed for us. By comparison the English literary public, insofar as it has not been destroyed by total war and general indifference and organized mass Philistinism, is more barbarous but also more vital. This is partly, I think, because England is still a hub of history where the shape of things to come can be sensed sooner, and where, in a measure, it is still being defined; whereas Italy is out of that stream, and it may be a long time before Italians experience the full spiritual effects of modern super-organization and technics. At present, the problems of Italians are in many ways the traditional problems: how to find enough to eat, and how to survive foreign invasions. It could be said that the Anglo-Saxon west is more 'advanced' than Italy, or is a 'younger' civilization. Both these words have some meaning. But what exactly being 'advanced' is, and what it implies, seems surely to require fresh definition now.

A few literary publications in Italy at present worth special mention are:

*Aretusa*. Naples. Monthly. Until recently edited by Francesco Flora.

*Mercurio*. Rome. Bi-monthly. Edited by Alba de Céspedes.

*Nuova Europa*. Rome. Weekly. Edited by Salvatorelli.

*Il Mondo*. Florence. Edited by Eugenio Montale.

*Poesia*. Rome. Quarterly. Edited by Enrico Falqui.

*Belfagor*. Florence. Monthly. Edited by Luigi Russo.

There are, doubtless, other periodicals in Milan and the north which I have not seen. Croce's *Critica* (Naples and Bari) has ceased publication as a regular review, but *Quaderni della Critica*—'Cahiers' of the *Critica*—are happily being published instead.

TONI DEL RENZIO

WARM WITH TEARS  
AND STRUGGLES

La nostra terra è lontana, nel sud,  
calda di lagrime e di lutti.

SALVATORE QUASIMODO  
*Con il piede straniero sopra il cuore.*

TO THE MEMORY OF EDOARDO PEISICO

THE review, *Poesia*, published a translation of Martin Heidegger's fine essay on Hölderlin, in which it is remarked that in poor times the poet is very rich. No one will want to deny the poverty of the times through the labyrinth of which we have, these last twenty-five years, threaded our way. In Italy an orphic poetry has been Ariadne to a Theseus or two. Fascism, as Pietro Pancrazi pointed out in the first number of *La Nuova Europa* eighteen months back, has influenced the young poets *à rebours* as it were. 'Fascism howled,' he wrote, 'and the poets of the time all spoke in undertones; Fascism exhibited a limitless trust in the most nauseous<sup>1</sup> and hyperbolic words, and the poets of the time could no longer trust themselves with even honest words, and muffled them in pure sound or used them with shifting allusions and significances. Fascism set about propaganding (it even invented this wicked word) and the poets about rendering themselves incomprehensible; it spoke of going to the people, and the poets, together with their critics, ran and shut themselves up on the top floor of the ivory tower.'

Far, therefore, from having a character differentiated from that of the European poetry of Valéry, Breton, Eluard, St. John Perse, Georg, Hesse, Lorca, Machado, Italian poetry was forced back upon itself, upon its symbolism, into its own world, accentuating its 'distance' from the regime. Nothing could be more misleading than Herbert Read's glib phrasing of an untested, modish intellectual myth, when some five years ago he wrote,

<sup>1</sup> The Italian reads '*smaccate*', a word meaning nauseously sweet and applied to bad wine.

'It is now eighteen years since Mussolini and his blackshirts marched on Rome (or travelled there in a railway carriage), but in all that time not a single work of art of universal significance has come from that country—nothing but bombast and vulgarity'. It would be uncharitable to ask Read to look in his own pages for 'bombast and vulgarity', but perhaps he might care to tell us if this is an annal of innocence or of experience.

The development of Italian poetry has been towards the more obscure, harsh, accursed and hermetic, the latest poetry taking this very word for its name. Like the surrealists in France in whose texts they have sought inspiration, the *ermetici* have been a storm-centre and practically without exception all the younger generation has assisted in the quarrels and polemics. With the liberation, another common feature of these two poetic movements came to notice—the passing of some of the protagonists over to the Communist Party, though it must be added that in Italy there has not been the consequent weakening and collapse as in France. The major poets, Ungaretti, Montale and Quasimodo have remained independent of, if not indifferent to, that party.

While the *ermetici* and indeed most Italian poets and writers accord full credit to the foreign influences that are constantly accepted by a tolerant cosmopolitanism, all, with the exception of Croce, see a continuous development from Leopardi to the present day, interrupted by the 'macchia nera di Carducci e—un po' meno—da quelle di Pascoli e d'Annunzio', to use the expression of Antonio Russi in the first number of *Aretusa*. In those pages he matched the movement of Italian poetry of the last hundred years or so with that of French poetry, suggesting a 'Da Leopardi agli ermetici' to parallel Marcel Raymond's *De Baudelaire au surréalisme*. I must say that Carducci remains without any influence upon today's poetry and I cannot understand Croce's obstinate admiration of him, which some have hinted is due to a fault of taste. But it cannot be maintained that d'Annunzio and Pascoli are so sterile. I had already noted their influence, subtle and subversive, even in their most fervent detractors; and in many of the present most notable successes I had seen some fulfilment of d'Annunzio's last solitary dreams, when I read Pancrazi's contribution to *Il Ponte* of March this year, in which he points out much this same tendency. He quotes several beautiful



lines from Pascoli which 'appartengono insieme al Pascoli e all'arrisicato Novecento':

Nascondi le cose lontane  
tu nebbia impalpabile e scialba  
tu fumo che ancora rampolli  
su l'alba  
da' lampi notturni e da' crolli  
d'aeree frane . . .<sup>1</sup>

D'Annunzio's presence can be traced in the frequent citations of Nietzsche which even Vincenzo Cardarelli made in the very pages of *La Ronda* where he launched his classical appeals against d'Annunzio, against Croce, against futurism. Yet though the novels may now, along with most of the plays, be unreadable, there is still an undeniable power in his poetry which has never been appreciated outside Italy. Indeed, this man has been a problem. Not only is there the present tendency to decry him in Italy, but previously his reputation nationally and internationally had been disparate. Perhaps this contradiction is owed to some congenital non-communication between the Italians and their fellow Europeans, since two other contemporary figures have offered similar cases, Marinetti and Silone. Greater than these, however, Leopardi himself has been regarded as a giant of romanticism, though the Italian neoclassical movement has seen in his meticulous prosody and in his admiration of the Cinquecento poets, its justification and inspiration. Cardarelli was able to write—I quote from memory—that it was not possible to conceive in Italy an art both durable and valid which was not classical. One must concur and it was thus a disagreeable experience to come across Stephen Spender's quoting *All'Italia* as similar to the opulent and somewhat vulgar *Ville Atroce* of Jouve and then compared with the poetry of Miguel Hernandez. Only a writer ignorant of Leopardi's use of language and incidentally of the state in which he wrote this particular poem, would dare have done this. I make these remarks because they are central to the understanding of contemporary Italian poetry, wherein

<sup>1</sup> This and subsequent translations are literal: Hide the distant things, you mist, pale and insubstantial, you vapour still rising in the dawn from nocturnal flashes and tremors of airy precipices.

there has been achieved that classicism for which Thierry Maulnier calls in vain in France.

Marinetti has had much more influence than is generally acknowledged. Despite his position in the Fascist movement, he was really an international figure and more debts are owed him outside than inside Italy. Nevertheless, he had been there a sort of impresario, finding work for a score of young architects and intervening from time to time to help some *avant-garde* art group. Though as late as the 'twenties, some of the futurists produced poems readable enough, none of them approached the level of the *rondisti*, and by 1927 none of the younger poets used the futurist manner. It is in the plastic arts and in architecture that futurism has had a profound effect. The former was charmingly acknowledged by André Breton in *Genèse et perspective artistique du surréalisme*, while the latter generally goes unrecognized. It is relevant to point out that Sant'Elia declared, on the eve of the 1915 intervention, that a house should be *un apparrecchio da vivere*, transformed somewhat later by Le Corbusier into a *machine à habiter*. More recently there might be indicated the debt of Maxwell Fry's *Letter* and the accompanying drawings in the May HORIZON to Gio Ponti's little book, *L'architettura è un cristallo*, of a year before.

D'Annunzio the poet will outlive the novelist and the playwright; and when the world has forgotten Fiume and can only conjure Duse from discoloured press-cuttings and scattered letters, his poetry will take its place among the greatest. Not only in *Alcyone* and in *Notturmo* but in the *Laudi* as well, there is a magic appeal, a call to all that is human in us, a Dionysiac song of our unity with creation in the most exalted moments of that *amour fou* which so many fear. There is, too, that almost calm diction whose colourful phrases seem like the various glasses *within* my Victorian paperweight. What chiefly unites him with our young poets, however, is the sensitive appreciation of the spirit of things, so that everything is animate and charged with an evocative current that will earth itself through our entrails at the least contact.

Chiaro leggero è l'arbore nell'aria.  
E perchè l'imo cor la sua bellezza  
ci tocchi, tu non sai, noi non sappiamo  
non sa l'ulivo.

Esili foglie, magri rami, cavo  
tronco, distorte barbe, piccol frutto,  
ecco, e un nume ineffabile risplende  
nel suo pallore!<sup>1</sup>

It was somehow appropriate to come across this fragment from *Alcyone* beneath a detail of Van Gogh's *La cueillette des olives*, where Aldo Cerchiari had placed it with exquisite and informed taste, in the volume *Alberi* of his series *Contrada dei pittori*.

The interbellum years were occupied with the reconciliation of symbolism—Mallarmé, Valéry, von Hofmannsthal—the Italian tradition of Leopardi; and even at the very end of the '15-18 war this is clear in the pages of *La Ronda*. This review united Cardarelli, Bacchelli, Baldini, Montano and Cecchi and later Gargiulo, Ungaretti and Savinio. In many respects *La Ronda* continued the Vocean movement. It continued the study of Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Mallarmé, Nietzsche. It continued the assimilation of these writers into the Italian literary conscious and thus carried forward the work begun by Boine, Serra, Rebora and Campana. The first two of these died young, Serra being killed in the war, to leave a moving though at times equivocal *Esame di coscienza*; Rebora abandoned poetry to enter religious orders; and Dino Campana was certified mad in 1918 and died after fourteen years in an asylum. But his reputation has steadily grown, and most of the young poets see him as the initiator, in his *Canti orfici*, of the new poetry.

Cardarelli was certainly the guiding genius of *La Ronda*, his own poetry having taken to the perilous rope suspended between neo-classicism and pantheistic pessimism as early as 1916. At that time many of the images and expressions that have entered into the common language of contemporary poetry, first made a diffident if delicately contrived appearance. The following lines, written some thirty years ago, are possessed of an aching nostalgia, to be found still today (even in Vittorio Sereni's cries from the living death he suffered in Algeria):

<sup>1</sup> Clear and light is the tree in this atmosphere. And why its beauty touches the depths of our hearts, you don't know, we don't know and neither does the olive.

Narrow leaves, lean branches, hollow trunk, twisted roots, tiny fruit, look, and a divine awe shines in its pallor.

E ora in queste mattine  
 così stanche  
 che ho smesso di chiedere e di sperare  
 —il pensiero si stacca dagli occhi  
 il dolore disegna  
 archi di riflessione nella carne  
 che cede con dolcezza  
 come la zolla a contatto del seme—  
 e tutto il giardino è per me  
 per il mio sontuosamente,  
 penso agli amici che mai rivedrò,  
 alle cose che sono state,  
 alle amanti rifiutate,  
 ai miei giorni di sole . . . <sup>1</sup>

Though Cardarelli was a considerable poet and though, as I will show later, the *rondisti* have had important influence upon Italian poetry since those troubled beginnings of troubled times, that movement was more decisive in its effect upon Italian prose. Cardarelli and the *rondisti* were masters of the form originally developed by Vocc, the *prosa d'arte*. This was a literary model including the prose poem, the poetic fragment in prose, pages from notebooks, and those cultivated pieces, somewhere between the prose-poem and the English essay, to which Enrico Falqui has given the name of *capitoli*. Though some of the impressionist spontaneity was lost by the *rondisti*, the careful construction and precise texture they put into this form, prepared for works like Elio Vittorini's *Conversazioni in Sicilia* which is hard to catalogue as novel or poem or collection of poems. It is composed of beautifully fashioned fragments whose unity is achieved in the rhythm of their succession. Benjamin Crémieux could find no better word to describe this form as used by Bacchelli, Baldini, Campana, Cardarelli, Cecchi than *natures mortes*. This very same expression has been used to describe the writings of Francis Ponge,

<sup>1</sup> Now in these mornings so tired that I have ceased asking and hoping—thought detaches itself from my eyes, sadness draws curves of reflexion in the flesh which yields with sweetness like the soil in contact with the seed—and the whole garden is for me, for my ravishing, I think of friends I'll never see, of the things which have been, of lovers given up, of my days of sun . . .

the recent extravagant acclamation of whom is surprising since he has done nothing but produce pastiches, in French twenty-five years afterwards, of the achievements of the *rondisti*.

Perhaps the most important task accomplished by *La Ronda* before its end in 1922 was to 'Italianize' Ungaretti. This poet had made his first appearance in the futurist *Lacerba*. He was a friend of Apollinaire and Breton and collaborated in the latter's Dadaist *Littérature*. He had published in 1916 at Udine in an edition of eighty copies *Porto Sepolto*, a collection of harsh, condensed lyrics written in the trenches. *La Guerre* appeared in Paris in 1919. This same year saw the publication of *Allegria di Naufragi* in which was gathered the *Porto Sepolto*, while *La Guerre* and other French poems were put in an appendix.

By the time his second collection, *Sentimento del Tempo*, appeared in 1933, he had absorbed the results of the experiences and researches to which *La Ronda* had guided him. This book justified the trust placed in him by the young generation. The futurists may have been the first young men in Italy for centuries, but they were so young as to have scarcely reached puberty. Their noisy revolt had no message for the bruised spirits of the Italian 'twenties. Ungaretti represented the young but adult men, and continued to express as no other the agonies which only the most obscure and fleeting language could dare to hint. For these unhappy creatures, the whole world was hostile; they were the strangers whose 'consciousness' gave them all too readily an 'existence'. They were the 'indifferent', to use the title of Moravia's first novel, which in 1929 was expressing this same attitude.

Ungaretti developed a language whose classical precision was owed to Leopardi, to Bembo, to Petrarch, but which he employed to transfix, as if upon the setting-board, those moths, inhabitants of the night, whose wings, singed as they circle madly, nearly douse the little flame of reason. He describes the silence and anxiety, the melancholy and nostalgia which seep through the staring, eyeless buildings and the blind, gazing, lunar squares that they surround in the paintings of de Chirico. The canvases of this painter, during his early inspired years, bear titles whose words occur again in the magic figurations of Ungaretti's most hermetic poetry, and are alone able to conjure the same misgivings and shivers from this *sentimento del tempo*:

Con fuoco d'occhi un nostalgico lupo  
Scorre la quiete nuda.

Non trova che ombre di cielo sul ghiaccio,  
Fondono serpe fatue e breve viole.<sup>1</sup>

The year 1925 discovered another poet who was charting the secrets of the dark interior seas, Eugenio Montale in *Ossi di Seppia*. Showing a knowledge of Eliot's poetry, these poems became almost at once a classic of the new movement which, separating itself more and more from *La Ronda*, saw in Dino Campana's disquieting orphism the first signs of a spiritual quest which lead the initiates into an underworld controlled by the most rigorous lyricism. Already in *Porto Sepolto* Ungaretti had sung, in the cruel way of his earlier manner, of that reduction of everything into the 'nulla', the inexhaustible and occult source of poetry. Between *Ossi di Seppia* and Heidegger's *Was ist Metaphysik?* many affinities may be seen. How much this existentialism is traceable directly to the reading of Kierkegaard, Scheler, Jaspers, Husserl and Heidegger cannot be said. Moreover there is the influence of Valéry, especially of *Cimitière Marin*:

l'être n'est qu'un défaut  
dans la pureté du non-être.

This current received a powerful and individual direction in Montale's deceptive poetry, which is much more 'difficult' than its coherence would lead one to suspect; and it grows more difficult with the latest poem, *Finisterre*, and after. This opinion of mine was confirmed by Ungaretti when I was speaking with him in Rome recently. Montale's unerring rightness of language prepares, so it seems, for a rationalism that is not only not to be found but is not at all intended. There is only the surrender to mysterious directions contained in these multi-signifying words, in the existentialism of these lines:

Forse un mattino andando, in un'aria di vetro  
arida, rivolgendomi vedro compirsi il miracolo,  
il nulla alle mie spalle, il vuoto dietro  
di me con un terrore di ubriaco.

<sup>1</sup> With eyes aflame a nostalgic wolf runs through the bare quiet. He only finds the sky's shadows on the ice are cast as deceptive snakes and brief-lived violets.

Poi, come su uno schermo, si accamperanno di gitto  
 alberi, case, colli per l'inganno consueto.  
 Ma sara troppo tardi ed io me ne andrò zitto,  
 tra gli uomini che non voltano, col mio segreto.<sup>1</sup>

Soon after Montale's appearance there were published several reviews which became the vehicles of this poetry and its criticism. Chief among these were Umberto Fracchia's *La Fiera letteraria* and later Alessandro Bonsanti's *Solaria* which published the first writing of Vittorini and added a third poet to the front rank, Salvatore Quasimodo, issuing in 1930 a tiny collection of his poems under the title of *Acque e terre*. A strange harmony is the quality one perceives first in the early poems, a harmony constructed from the dark and contrary rhythms of the blood and from a faultless diction. He has brought to Italian poetry a spirit at once exciting and classical, expressed in a lyrical 'abandon' (though this last word, it must be added, is misleading in that it gives no hint of Quasimodo's inheritance from the Greek epics). The anguish which tears its way through the interior void in his poetry is akin to those incantatory passages which survive through the classical periods of Rome and Greece. Indeed, this poet is disturbing in his combination of the oldest and the new... experiences. His translations from the Greek and Latin poets are astounding in their fidelity and in the freshness of their language. This is especially noticeable in his version of the *Georgics* which is authoritative as far as scholarship is concerned and little short of genius as far as the poetry is concerned, avoiding that macaronic into which Italian translation from the Latin can easily descend. In all his poetry there is a newness and an inescapable echo of the archaic, as in this poem wherein one is sure the accents of some totemic ancestor can be heard:

Invano cerchi tra la polvere,  
 povera mano: la città è morta.  
 E morta: s'è udito l'ultimo rombo  
 sul cuore del Naviglio. E l'usignolo

<sup>1</sup> Perhaps one morning on my way in a glass-dry air, I will turn round and see the miracle accomplished; the nothingness at my shoulders, the void behind me with a drunken terror.

Then, as in defence, houses, trees and hills will be set up in a flash for the customary deceit. But it will be too late and I will go away silent, among the men who don't turn, with my secret.



è caduto dall'antenna, alto sul muro del convento  
 dove ogni giorno cantava prima il tramonto.  
 Non scavate pozzi nei cortili:  
 i vivi non hanno più sete.  
 Non toccate i morti, così rossi, così gonfi:  
 lasciateli nella terra delle loro case:  
 la città è morta, è morta.<sup>1</sup>

In 1937, beneath these three, Ungaretti, Montale and Quasimodo, a shifting and rising current was surrealistising the younger writers. First in *Frontespizio* and then in *Campo di Marte*, these set out from a sort of catholic pessimism eaten with the acid of *Les chants de Maldoro* and mixed with the bitter spirits of such surrealist writers as they were able to import. These *ermetici* were never organized into a compact disciplined group such as Breton conducted in Paris, issuing anathemata and exercising *imprimatur*, so that it is difficult to declare who was and who was not one of them. In the inquiry of the review *Primato*, it appears that Ungaretti, Montale and Quasimodo rather regarded themselves as outside the movement. This, however, is not the view usually taken, and one would be hard pressed to indicate any difference of attitude between the major triad and the younger poets, except in such variations as personality may have introduced and in individual styles.

At first Alfonso Gatto was the chief of the younger poets. Later Mario Luzi, with his *Avvento Notturmo* curiously charged with dannunzian sentiments, superseded him and along with Parronchi and Bigongiari formed the *poeti delle rose*. Flowers, especially roses and violets, which two sorts had held sway over Italian poetry from Petrarch to Leopardi, entered into poetic cultivation again, after the futurists and the pre-'15 poetry had succeeded in uprooting them for a dozen years or so. It is possibly this use of flowers as images and emblems that recalled d'Annunzio who had alone preserved them in his verse. But it is really due to Mallarmé that flowers were able to

<sup>1</sup> In vain you seek in the dust, poor hand: the city is dead. Is dead: the last boom has been heard in the heart of the Naviglio. And the nightingale has fallen from the yardarm, high on the wall of the convent where each day he first sang the sunset. Don't dig wells in the courtyards: the living are no longer thirsty. Don't touch the dead, so red, so swollen: leave them in the earth of their houses: the city is dead, is dead.

re-enter Italian poetry, at once more profound, more charming and more defiant. Remember these poets began to speak the language of flowers when the regime spoke of steel, of violence, and had expended lives in Ethiopia, in Spain, and prepared for the intervention of 1940, treacherous alike to France and Britain and to the Italian people.

I can think of no poem more typical of Luzi's emblematic poetry than this fragment from *Avvento Notturmo* with its haunted images and funereal overtones:

Nulla più che un chiarore s'avvicina agli spalti,  
alle corna spettrali dei palazzi,  
il vuoto s'avvicenda nelle cave  
specchiere, nella febbre viola dei basalti.  
La tua forma nell'aria si ripete  
lungo un prisma ammaliato e una pallida rete.<sup>1</sup>

From Alfonso Gatto should be quoted these lines for their rare qualities and both for their similarity to Luzi's and for their difference:

Il tuo chiamare accanto alla tua voce,  
ultima libertà senza paese,  
fu desolato amore che distese  
in te solo caduto la sembianza.

Ascolto, all'eco della lontananza  
mare morto nel mare alla sua foce.

Tutto si calma di memoria e resta  
il confine più dolce della terra,  
una lontana cupola di festa.<sup>2</sup>

There is not room to quote from the other poets of this group, however invidious it may have been to quote from these

<sup>1</sup> Nothing more than a twilight approaches the walls at the spectral horns of the palaces, the void alternates in the hollow mirrors, in the feverish violet of the basalt stones. Your form in the air is repeated along a bewitched prism and a pale net.

<sup>2</sup> Your calling beside your voice, last homeless liberty, was a sad love which gave its semblance to you alone in your fall.

I hear in the echo of the distance dead sea in the sea's mouth.

All grows still with memory and remains the sweetest limit of the land, a distant pleasure dome.

two alone. I must, however, list those who joined in this inward pursuit of poetry and in this research after an expression adequate to their alienation: Giancarlo Vigorelli, Libero de Libero, Leonardo Sinisgalli, Adriano Grande, Sergio Solmi, Sergio Ortolani and Sandro Penna. This last, more or less directly, influenced and was influenced by the Triestin, Umberto Saba who, otherwise indifferent it seems to the younger movement, continued his personal crepuscular poetry to such developments as to be comparable to the *ermetici*. Another poet of this older generation, Carlo Linati, who translated Yeats, Synge and Lady Gregory into Italian, continues to produce a poetry of insinuating appeal and an essay or two of penetration and charm.

I have earlier made some references to the prose writers. I cannot overstress, however, the *frammentismo* of Vocean origin, developed by the *rondisti*, and present in them all, so that a novel in the English sense is hard to conceive. Moravia was able to achieve it in his first novel, *Gli Indifferenti*, which remains the most important work of fiction to have appeared during the Fascist rule. Susceptible to the whole literary movement from 1929 when his novel first appeared, Moravia succumbed to the fascination and subtlety of the fragmentary *prosa d'arte* and to the growing interest in Kafka and the expressionists. He has not only written short stories like those in the collections, *L'Amante infelice*, *L'Epidemia* and *I sogni del pigro*, but also he has created the novels like *La mascherata* from skilfully woven fragments. Even the five short novels gathered together under the name *L'Imbroglione*, which he describes as *ritorno all'intreccio e all'aneddoto*, are really cleverly joined fragments. This applies also to Gianna Manzini's prize-winning *Lettera all'editore* which is a beautiful example of the contemporary fragmentist style.

Carlo Levi's *Cristo s'è fermato a Eboli* is constructed in this fashion, too. It is a disarming book by a painter. Genial, he has recorded faithfully his experiences among the peasants of Lucania whither he was sent in exile. I know of no other description at once so generous and sincere and honest, of these antique pre-Christian people of that remote province whose most popular proverb he has taken for title. It is Emilio Cecchi who is perhaps the greatest master of *frammentismo*, refurbishing and condensing, polishing, crystallizing, until he has created a jewel of perfect

Tuscan. I think no other modern writer has ever equalled his elegant *capitoli*. Massimo Bontempelli, too, has written charming critical fragments and perhaps his short stories should come under this heading as well. I might add Palazzeschi, Papini, Landolfi, Brancati, Piovene, and Quarantotti Gambini, who all exhibit this tendency in their prose writing. Several of the younger writers have produced works in this style, and from them may be mentioned Carlo Bo's *Diario chiuso e aperto* and Leonardo Sinisgalli's *Fiori pari e fiori dispari*.

Even critical writing has been developed in a fragmentist manner by the *rondisti* and by Gargiulo and De Robertis who were followed by Carlo Bo and Oreste Macrì. These four represent the two generations of *ermetici*, the latter pair in, respectively, *Otto studi* and *Esemplari del sentimento poetico contemporaneo*, taking hermetic criticism to the extreme. Given the nature of Italian prose as it has developed since 1919 and the 'cult' of hermetic poetry, it was only to be expected that this arcane allusive critical writing should come about, in which the critics were acolytes to the poets' sacerdotes. Both Bontempelli and Francesco Flora have opposed this criticism from their different points of view. The former still bears the stigmata of his earlier *stracittà* with which *novecentist* movement he opposed the *strapaese* of some of the *rondisti*; but it is not interesting to revive this old quarrel. Flora, however, has a warm sympathy and intelligent understanding of the poets, but has more and more felt himself bound to oppose the irrationalism which they were assuming to be inherent in art. Even so, during his editorship the review, *Aretusa*, was the forum of all that will decide the future of Italian culture. *La Massegna d'Italia* which he now edits continues this function, number 8 containing some interesting writing by Luzi upon occasional poetry and an essay by Carrà upon Modigliani. Indeed, it is probable that the present fierce exchange of polemics on the nature of culture could be traced to ideas that received their first post-liberation expression in the former paper.

The debate now taking place has pushed the names of Kierkegaard, Jaspers and Nietzsche forward. In a note in *Il Politecnico*, Elio Vittorini maintained that all past culture, using Christ and Plato as its archetypes, fulfilled a consoling function. All the young writers have entered the fray and a general examination of principles is in process while the position of existentialism is put

in question. Luperini, in the communist *Società*, contributes a startling *Rigore della cultura* which, but for a few Marxist terms and slogans not at all relevant to his argument, might well be a typical existentialist product. It carries all the signs of its author's previous preoccupation with Husserl's *Phänomenologie*. Carlo Bo, fresh from his *Antologia del surrealismo* and his *Bilancio del surrealismo*, differs only in adding to his existentialism the terms and slogans of his catholicism. He remains, however, the most able and admirable of the younger critics.

Writing above of Montale I found it necessary to refer to existentialism and certainly this philosophic attitude, deriving, as its Italian adherents demonstrate, from Kant, can be seen leading its terminology and its terrifying logic to very many literary manifestations. It should be noted, however, that Sartre has not achieved much of a success in Italy for the reason that Italian writers are too well informed and acquainted with Heidegger's works to be occupied for long by M. Sartre's diffusions. There are in circulation two different translations of, for example, *Was ist Metaphysik?* two volumes of selected passages, the one from *Sein und Zeit* alone and the other from *Vom Wesen des Grundes* as well, and Enrico Falqui's *Poesia* has put Antoni's translation of the Study of Hölderlin into print again.

The official organ of what was the Royal Institute of Philosophy has produced a special double number containing essays by Jaspers and some dozen Italian writers upon existentialism. This volume is valuable for its complete Italian bibliography which, excluding newspaper items, contains over seven hundred entries from 1922 to the present time.

What emerges from this vast literature is the almost desperate attempt to relate poetry to human activity in such a way as not to destroy poetry and to make life itself poetic. This restores to philosophy some of its original significance and mythic preoccupation, serving thus to compensate for the failure of semantics to cope adequately with the necessary and valid emotive and irrational constituent in all languages. This is true of even so apparently an austere language as mathematics to some of the equations of which Lautreamont and more recently Sinisgalli have been able to react emotively and aesthetically.

Such a philosophy will naturally find much of its expression

in works of art and in this respect constitutes an advance upon surrealism. In Italy the foremost writers have all served as its vehicles, not always so much by express design as by being unable to avoid it as an important element in the air of the times. Moravia in *Gli indifferenti* and in the recent short novel, *La Mascherata*, Landolfi and Brancati, these two both owing to Kafka, all take on an existentialist outlook. Thus, too, Curzio Malaparte in his considerable *Kaput*. All the *ermetici* and their critics have an existentialist colour to their language, Ungaretti or Bo, Luzi or Macrì. Among the writers more properly philosophers must be mentioned Luporini, Enzo Paci, Abbagnano and Carlini as adopting the existentialist attitude.

I have already referred to the review *Poesia* edited by Enrico Falqui. I would list this review as one of the most important in Europe and its pages are written by the leading poets of the world or at least of the western world, if that can be understood to include the Psalms and early medieval Mozarabic poetry. Numbers 3 and 4, among so much of interest and importance, printed Breton's Yale discourse. Everywhere in Italy one meets with the name of Breton, and those whose judgement one would respect all agree in finding him a much greater figure than Eluard.

Inevitably, in view of the present difficulties of communication, this account of Italian poetry is not complete. But though many writers are not included, chiefly owing to my not having suitable texts,<sup>1</sup> I can say that Italian poetry possesses a homogeneity and an excellence that both promise much. There are the signs everywhere of a cultural revival such as is lacking in France. It may be that a new renaissance is approaching or perhaps a second *risorgimento*. Not only is there this literary revival but, at last, after seven frustrated centuries' dreams, a united Italian Republic has been achieved. Dare I say that today's poets, obscure though their message be, harsh and strange their accents, are yet the legitimate heirs of Dante? The peninsula has risen as from its death-bed. Its people have suffered the anguish and the hurts of victory with its partisans, and of defeat with its prisoners scattered throughout the world. But life and culture return. There are, I say, the signs of greatness and the poets are not less than they are needed.

<sup>1</sup> Notably Beniamino dal Fabbro, translator of the *Surrealist Manifesto*.

[A review of the recent numbers of Italian literary magazines, which completes this essay, will follow next month]





MAX ERNST  
Gardenia. 1945



Euclid. 1945





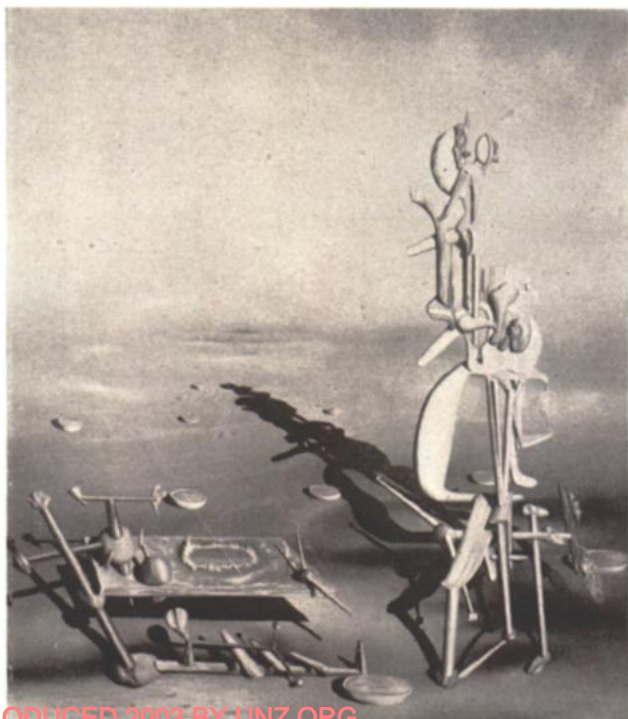
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